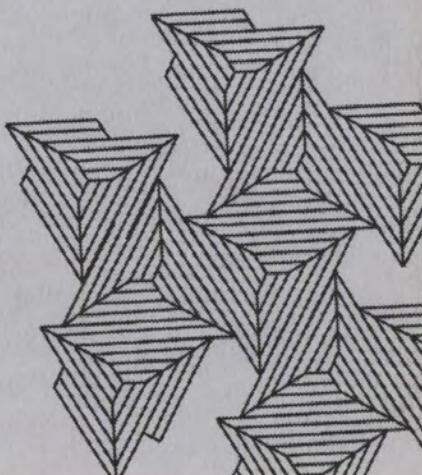


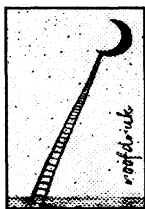
Freedom's Disorder

a collection of texts by
Massimo Passamani



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INTRODUCTION

The texts in this compilation are taken from several Italian publications, the majority (the first fourteen) of the texts were published in the periodical *Canenero*. This initiative was of great importance in the anarchist movement of that epoch, which is why we will dedicate a few lines to it below, with the goal of contextualising, be it shortly, the analyses that are developed here.

The text *Scattered thoughts on Utopia* (*Pensieri sparsi su utopia*) appeared in March 1994 in the fourth and last issue of the magazine *L'ammutinamento del pensiero*, published in Bologna since 1990.

In the Open Air was written in 2004 as a contribution to the debate which was at that time developing around the repression, that in that moment once again hit the Italian subversive anarchist movement. It went from hand to hand.

Canenero was a weekly anarchist publication that existed from October 1994 until March 1997. It was a space of important confluence at that time, “A periodical (...) of vagabund destruction, understanding with that the possibility of attacking the State and domination in all its forms, without, so to speak, swearing an oath to whatever banner. Always as individuals, also there where the irrevocable desire of sharing brings us to choose the path of doing things together” (from the editorial in the first issue). The title played with the fact that Cane Nero (black dog) in Latin means “Sing, oh Nero”.

Even though it answered to a much bigger need, the reason that determined its creation was a coming together of comrades from various cities in order to

show solidarity with four arrested anarchists after a bankrobbery in Rovereto in September 1994. The idea for the periodical followed quickly.

A few comrades edited the publication, although it had quite a wide network of contributors and distributors. Its existence was marked, in several ways, by the repression. A first team of editors published the magazine until June 1995 (plus a special issue that came out in November of the same year). It was then that the so-called Marini trial took place, in which the judge with that same name started prosecutions against thirty comrades – some of which were already in prison or on the run – accusing them of belonging to an armed gang. Forty more anarchists stayed out on bail, accused of “subversive association”. There is sufficient material in English regarding this topic, which is why we won’t go into details here. In any case the matter was, obviously, very present in the content of the publication, and therefore also in the following texts. Furthermore, the repressive blow directly affected the editing staff of the publication, since some of the comrades that were locked up or on the run were part of it. More people then joined the project and the newspaper came out again in October of the same year. The last issue was published in January 1997.

For a lot of comrades doing the publication meant a coexistence during several days of the week, with the consequent rupture of the daily rhythms and routines, which led to them developing very intense relations. However, more than the repression in a strict sense, what ended the project were the differences between different anarchists, differences that were not linked to the “technical” aspects like the defense during trial

or things about style, but differences in perspective. After years of apparent understanding, the concepts of specific organisation, armed struggle, insurrection, affinity, solidarity, responsibility etc. became heavily loaded, during the small storm unleashed by Marini, of major concreteness, although not always of major clarity. If the debate languished, neither the polemics nor the desillusions were nonetheless missing. For the comrades that then ceased to be part of the project the bases for continuing with it already did not exist anymore. They defined the experience as “an adventure without remorse”.

Canenero was more than a piece of paper, it was an active part of the movement, which brought it to be seen, in the phantasmagoric framework imagined by the judiciary system, as the ‘spokesperson’ of anarchist terrorism. *Canenero* had a periodical assembly open to anyone who wanted to participate and they organised meetings about the individual, informal organisation, affinity groups and insurrection, besides launching several initiatives of struggle. It was characterised by an agile analysis, with only one theoretical article, as well as a review. It claimed to do a reading “against the grain” of what happened during the week, trying to comprehend, also through the apparently worse episodes, the reality of the social war. Therefore some of the texts based on events that are too far away, or too linked to the specific Italian reality, have not been included in this volume. The goal was to understand the possibilities and limits of the tessitura of the moment: a lively anarchist movement inserted into a context of great social pacification, which, with an insurrectionary perspective, rather directed itself openly toward agitation than

toward specific intervention in struggles next to the other exploited. We consider the topics brought up in *Canenero* important and still relevant in the context we find ourselves in today, which is why we have decided to publish this compilation.

Amsterdam, 2014

FREEDOM'S DISORDER

The state is the supreme expression of institutional order. It is a model of social organization built on hierarchy, control and coercion. According to one view that many anarchists share, institutional order is nothing other than the usurpation of another kind of order that could be described as spontaneous.

The theory is that social life is realized through rules that are intrinsic to it, i.e., rules that tend to occur in all contexts. This self-regulating capacity of the social whole is suffocated by the external intervention of the state (an intervention, that is to say, which corresponds to other rules, precisely those of institutional order). And anarchists have always based their theory and revolutionary projects on this spontaneity. Spontaneity both in the insurrectional clash and in the organization of society from the base when the intervention of the various political and economic activities is suspended by the struggle in course. Where there is a relative absence of power, the exploited tend to satisfy the requirements of production and distribution in a horizontal manner.

Seen in this way, *real* order is not that of the state which creates inequality, domination and consequently civil war, but precisely that which is spontaneous. This is the idea that Proudhon expressed with the famous phrase: "Freedom is the mother, not the daughter of order." Order imposed from above ends up suffocating freedom while maintaining and expanding the rigid and increasingly rational organization of techniques of government. On the other hand, the complete expression of freedom would eliminate the reasons for social disorder.

I do not agree with this way of formulating the problem. And it is certainly a problem of considerable importance. What follows should therefore be read as a series of questions, above all for the writer.

It is not possible to make a distinct separation between society and the state. There is no inside or outside. In fact, if it is true that the state transforms what is produced into coercive strength in social relations, it is just as true that the power to alienate, transfer and organize this strength comes from society itself. The state has nothing of its own. And that's not all. Every social context tends to institutionalize relationships between individuals. When it is the context that conditions relations, these become mere *functions* of a broader organization. Without the ceaseless will to come together and determine our associations starting from our desires, society becomes a reciprocal belonging, a bond that reproduces and autonomizes the only common element: the absence of freedom.

What I am trying to say is something a bit different from the idea that domination is a product of the dominated. It seems difficult to me to contest that if no one were to obey, no one would be able to command, as Belleguarrigue stated. But that is not what interests me here. To put it another way, I believe that there is a self-regulating spontaneity that the state extorts. Or rather, I believe that power and hierarchy are just as spontaneous as freedom and difference. Furthermore, it may be precisely domination that expresses social spontaneity (without, for this reason, falling into a reverse reading of Rousseau). Moreover, the concept of order has been used far too often as a synonym for the absence, or at least the reasonably containment, of conflict. Since it is

the state that creates conflict, a society free of its interference would be *ordered*. In my opinion, however, authority does not originate in dispute, in the impossibility of harmonizing what is different, but rather in the attempt to impose harmony by force, to *resolve*, which is to say to annihilate, contraries. Class division and hierarchy are expressions of mutilated difference.

Another conception of order makes difference itself the common element, the space of the interpenetration of opposites. But the only way opposites can be harmonized is by making difference a mere *function* of something greater. But instead, it should be order that is a *function* of difference. In other words, the freedom that is tolerated or guaranteed with the aim of creating a harmonious society is not the sort that expresses singularity (that *singularis* which for the Latins was totally distinct). The space of individuality is a union that is always changeable and can never become a mere container.

Identifying principles of social spontaneity, charging them with a value that goes well beyond the purely descriptive aspect, really means singling out tasks and aims. As I see it, there is no guarantee that society without the state would necessarily have to be free. This is where freedom's charm originates, precisely from the fact that it is a *decision*, both in the sense of a stratagem that goes beyond merely spontaneous development, and in the sense of rupture, of differentiation. Relations of mutuality without command can only be realized by constructing something, not by taking something away. If spontaneous forms of order exist, they can at most be a basis from which to start, a mutually anti-social basis.

When we rid ourselves of the destinies of spontaneity as well as the impositions of every institution, the concept of order becomes an area that is more linguistic than real. Perhaps this is how one could explain the profound antipathy that every rebel has always felt towards it. "Free, that is to say ordered," I have read it so often. Come on, let's not be silly.

THE BODY AND REVOLT

The entire history of western civilization can be read as a systematic attempt to exclude and isolate the body. From Plato on, it has been seen at various times as a folly to control, an impulse to repress, labor power to arrange or an unconscious to psychoanalyze.

The platonic separation between the body and the mind, a separation carried out to the complete advantage of the latter ("the body is the tomb of the mind"), even accompanies the seemingly most radical expressions of thought.

Now, this thesis is supported in numerous philosophy texts, almost all except those that are alien to the rarefied and unwholesome atmosphere of the universities. A reading of Nietzsche and of the authors like Hannah Arendt has found its appropriate scholastic systematization (phenomenological psychology, idea of difference and a way of pigeon-holing). Nonetheless, or actually because of this, it does not seem to me that this problem, the implications of which are many and fascinating, has been considered in depth.

A profound liberation of individuals entails an equally profound transformation of the way of conceiving the body, its expression and its relations.

Due to a battle-trained christian heritage, we are led to believe that domination controls and expropriates a part of the human being without however damaging her inner being (and there is much that could be said about the division between a presumed inner being and external relationships). Of course, capitalist relationships and state impositions adulterate and pollute life, but we think that our perceptions of ourselves and of

the world remain unaltered. So even when we imagine a radical break with the existent, we are sure that it is our body as we presently think of it that will act on this.

I think instead that our body has suffered and continues to suffer a terrible mutilation. And this is not only due to the obvious aspects of control and alienation determined by technology. (That bodies have been reduced to reservoirs of spare organs is clearly shown by the triumph of the science of transplants, which is described with an insidious euphemism as a “frontier of medicine”. But to me the reality seems much worse than pharmaceutical speculations and the dictatorship of medicine as a separate and powerful body reveals.) The food we eat, the air we breathe and our daily relations have atrophied our senses. The senselessness of work, forced sociality and the dreadful materiality of chit-chat regiment both mind and body, since no separation is possible between them.

The docile observance of the law, the imprisoning channels into which desires, which such captivity really transforms into sad ghosts of themselves, are enclosed weakens the organism just as much as pollution or forced medication.

“Morality is exhaustion,” said Nietzsche.

To affirm one’s own life, the exuberance that demands to be given, entails a transformation of the senses no less than of ideas and relationships.

I have frequently come to see people as beautiful, even physically, who had seemed almost insignificant to me until a short time earlier. When you are projecting your life and test yourself in possible revolt with someone, you see in your playmates beautiful individuals, and not the sad faces and bodies that extinguish their light in

habit and coercion any more. I believe that they really are becoming beautiful (and not that I simply see them as such) in the moment in which they express their desires and live their ideas.

The ethical resoluteness of one who abandons and attacks the power structures is a perception, a moment in which one tastes the beauty of one's comrades and the misery of obligation and submission. "I rebel, therefore I am" is a phrase from Camus that never ceases to charm me as only a reason for life can do.

In the face of a world that presents ethics as the space of authority and law, I think that there is no ethical dimension except in revolt, in risk, in the dream. The survival in which we are confined is unjust because it brutalizes and uglifies.

Only a different body can realize that further view of the life that opens to desire and mutuality, and only an effort toward beauty and toward the unknown can free our fettered bodies.

THE LOGIC OF MEASURE

*Many are the things that cannot be measured but nothing
is more immeasurable than man.*

— Sophocles

The meaning of measure. It is an enclosure that is simultaneously a dispute with and management of life, a prison that poses the existence of people *equal to zero*.

And yet, as Protagoras said, the human being is the measure of all things. His intelligence is the place in which they are linked together. If the human being herself is this measure, this threshold, it means that he has no place and that her home is *atopia*.

A measure to impose, and the punishment for those who arrogantly go beyond it, only has meaning if it provides a boundary, a homeland, to human life. And this homeland is nothing more than the designation of a space built around the limits in which one tries to constrain that which is particularly unlimited, singularity.

But it is really the place of the limit to create *trans-gression*, and to justify itself as limit through punishment.

Errare divinum est (To err is divine), said Savinio. Only when we pose the measure of individuals as something that transcends them do crime and punishment have a foundation. "To err" pertains to the gods. If their empire, their *measure*, falls, the limits created in their image and likeness fall as well. The human being cannot help but go beyond the limits, since he himself is the limit, the boundless threshold. Furthermore, only in this hubris, in this arrogance, is her possibility for affirming herself as individual to be found.

As Holderlin understood with regards to Sophocles' Oedipus, the human being questions and lives "immeasurably". Relegating his individuality to the place of law, aberrations will always occur, because *ab-errare* ["in wandering" as well as "in error" — *translator*] is where one's individuality has its place. To the extent that the individual is her own measure, she succeeds in not sacrificing her *atopia*, in being rooted in the absence of place.

This absence of place is an utter absurdity for philosophy. And this is why its words have always advised moderation, the truth that stands in the middle. But that middle makes the human being into a puppet of god (and of every authority), a result of hubris and power, a mistake that poses a remedy.

The measure is god's, the state's, society's. All attempts to harmonize, to tolerate difference refer to a limit that is always collective. Whether this boundary is the one and indisputable truth or the multiplicity of truths is of little importance. If the truths are constrained to compose a social ensemble of which they end up *being a part*, there is no space for singularity, but only for different appraisals with respect to the techniques with which to preserve these walls which one could not want to destroy. Each *in her own way* can only be a slave. The ensemble of society — the meaning of measure — is that which one need not take into account, "except as the object of destruction."

The uniqueness of each of us cannot be an element of something else because difference is itself the common space. The only place for difference is the absence of place. Individuality must defend its difference and want the difference of others to exist as well. My difference is revealed because that of others exists.

Power, on the contrary, is the foundation of a territory of identity and measurement, a territory from which it is impossible to escape without destroying the community of those who have been made equal to zero (that Michelstaedter called the “wicked clique”) and building the common difference.

I think that affirming one’s singularity is the exact opposite of the defensive armoring of oneself, that prison-like enclosure from which (as the skeptical “reaction” to the religion of the common good and sacrifice would have it) to control the world with the disenchantment of doubt. Difference is not a slit through which to spy on the movements of the other, afraid that she might go too far in making his way and thus could disturb our tranquility. There isn’t any kitchen garden to cultivate as Voltaire believed. Distrust, the fear of the other that makes us move away suddenly when we touch a strange body, is an ivory tower under siege. The immeasurable dimension in which it is possible to live together without domination and abuse, and so also without their double, Harmony, can “settle” in no one place.

Singularity has no homeland because the homeland is power.

The individual in revolt is a “restless place between the night and the light”, between destruction and creation. And more. The light itself is darkness, since Phanes “sits inside, in the sanctuary of the night.” But not even the liquidation of the dialectic that always transforms the negative into the positive, annihilating it, is capable of becoming a certainty. If we were to look for the measure, the one of being *against* or *outside*, in the sanctuary of the night, we would end up becoming evangelists of demolition, pensioners of revolt.

In its endless skirmishes, the Logic seems unshakable. And yet its rigid form cannot resist anyone who wants to live without measure.

Once again, more than a project, it is a question of knowing how to live.

CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS

Yes, I know, we are all against axioms, guarantees, certainties.

But can we really live without sharing our being against — without depending upon this sharing?

The search for identity is not always oriented toward the mass, toward the great crowds of followers. Even the small group can become our safe space. What's more, the very refusal of every group and of any form of membership can construct its own arrogant, solitary radicality through the play of recognition.

My stubborn solitude is fed by what it opposes; it even — or maybe, above all — feeds on criticisms.

To appear to be against someone or something that seems to assume the features of authority — a charismatic person, a common truth — is not always an act of revolt. Its origins could be, for example, the desire to receive part of the light of that which one challenges by taking the role of challenger. As if saying: I beg you to notice that I have no leaders.

I believe that the reality of not being esteemed (which is to say valued and measured) — even in the form of a certain hostility — by a group has greater significance in the renunciation of revolt than repression. And there is no resigned desistance that does not degenerate into resentment, quick to assemble in new, spiteful herds.

Two or three words, the same ones, repeated in some meeting, and there they are joining the discussion that unfailingly ensues, in hope that other words — two or three — will replace them.

All right, it is as you say, I am going too far. But doesn't seem to you that this all consolidates the group and calcifies thought?

Starting from myself, what is said to me always seems so imprecise and reassuring, that hearing it continually repeated is frankly too much.

Deepening relations of affinity would have to mean making difference emerge (otherwise, on what do we base affinity?). And yet one doesn't escape homogeneity (the fact that some anarchist use this word in a positive sense makes my head spin) by refusing conferences, membership cards and other blatantly formal fixations.

The mechanisms — I hesitate to say rhythms, but perhaps they really are rhythms — , the rhythms, then, of participation and compromise stress our lives well beyond measure. Thinking for ourselves, as Lessing expressed it, is never the outcome.

What would the desire to rebuild be if it never leads us to destruction? What would it be if it anchored us to the role of destroyer?

Gottfried Benn said that the one who loves ruins also loves statues. And with regard to statues, Benn, it was understood.

Perhaps it is anxiety about the future that transforms individuals into puppets of a group. A life considering needs a solid basis. Obedience and calculation live under the sign of an eternal tomorrow.

But aren't ideas — coagulants of language — giving us the awareness of time?

Thought is born only when desire grows pale. Living the moment, the immediacy of existence, completely, does one have no future, does one have no time — does one have no ideas?

If all values collapse (is it possible?), only “because it pleases me, that’s why” remains.

So many acrobatics to discover what children have always known.

The relation of mutuality — in no way a moral good, in no way a duty — is maybe really a relationship between children.

LIKE IN CHURCH

A known and hospitable place. I think that for the most part this is the image we have of the assembly. We read in a journal or on a poster that there is a meeting, a debate, and we find ourselves seated, almost always in a circle (perhaps in homage to the Enlightenment idea of “Encyclopedia”, that really means circular learning), waiting for someone to introduce and elucidate the topic for us. If the theme of the discussion is specific enough, we are convinced that expertise is required and so participation is quite limited. On the other hand, if it is a bit broader and more complex, everyone has her say without any deference. And yet in the end, one always remains a bit frustrated.

This is because, whatever is actually being discussed that, upon consideration, encourages us to take part, the assembly in which it takes place is viewed as external, a well from which one draws, and, for the most part, draws little. In this way, the criticism is focused on the assembly and never on one's own participation.

Of course, we meet with people with whom we get along and do projects and initiatives outside the debates, but participation in an assembly as such is not the outcome of an inquiry and a ripened interest. There is hardly any element of continuity between the various meetings, the reflections that precede them and those that follow them. Just as no one asks us first what the topic of discussion means for us, so also there is little to remind us of it afterwards. At any rate, if one were to organize a meeting on the same topic after some time had passed, the discussion would start over again, each one giving a monologue in company.

In my opinion, this is not merely due to the insufficient determination of those who participate passively in the assemblies (even the act of speaking can be an element of passivity), but to something a bit deeper. In order to discuss together — in a meeting atmosphere, because in more limited contexts the discussion changes — it is necessary to have a determined set of words in common. The further one goes beyond the sphere of the specialty, the less one has to say. The proper words are lacking. This can be verified in many ways. If we take sufficiently specific contexts — let's say that of anarcho-syndicalism or the occupation of spaces — and, for fun, proclaim the ten words that so often form the language and mental universe of those who are involved in them, we realize that one couldn't even write a flyer. Maybe someone will say I exaggerate. Perhaps. But I am certain that they are the very words that they do not manage to find when they encounter topics of a more general range.

Though it may seem strange, another limit is the necessity to perceive the immediately expedient twists and turns of the discussion at all costs. To achieve this aim that is somewhat forced, thought cannot always be freely developed. Ideas have need of empty space in which to move. And I believe that it is from this very *emptiness* that a real practice of liberation is born, a void that often brings rending where we thought the most solid unity existed.

As long as we meet to confront, let us say, more theoretical questions, delegation is reduced to a mere lack of deepening (which phenomena of charisma and subordination can determine) but when there are important decisions to be made that presuppose knowledge

of the subjects upon which the possible choices bear, anyone who has a greater knowledge of the matter has the power to direct the discussion. Or rather, considering the disparity of knowledge and the precise will to impose one's resolutions, there is no better environment than this in which to meet. In the long run, the technique of participation obtains better results than what one would get through unilateral propaganda or with the *ex cathedra* lecture.

Power is really seeking to take away our words and our critical capacity to reflect in order to then give us the possibility of *expressing our opinion* on everything.

Nothing more can come to us from assemblies than what each of us as individuals strives to put into them. At best, those intuitions that our personal exploration suggests to us could be developed.

When there is no openness to listening, that is to say, to paying attention to new realms of thought, of *one's own* thought, we will always find ourselves saying the same things, whatever the topic of discussion may be.

Anchored to our faith like in a church (the name of which comes, perhaps not by chance, from the Greek *ecclesia*, that means, precisely, assembly), we repeat our rituals in order to go on back to our houses with little questioned as always. Until the next discussion.

SEASONING REVOLT, WITHOUT FUSS

Life's experiences leave their mark on us. And yet we rarely examine them with the kind of attention that opens ongoing questions about our choices.

I am not speaking of a personal version of historical memory, i.e., of the tiresome renewal in ourselves of an identity that we drag along and to which we give allegiance — all this is about a sacred *systemization* that is quite similar to the deprived way that power operates. The memory of which I want to speak is, like Heraclitus' "I have explored myself", an uninterrupted questioning of ourselves.

When we forget our past experiences, we are often led to enclose our *current* perspectives within the pathways of others, almost as if we don't want to understand or, worse yet, we dismiss that which still belongs to us as experience. I'll give an example.

I remember the importance that the first march that I helped organize — it was an anti-militarist march — had for me. From that time on, due to my tendency to think the "same" thoughts, a consistent repetition of some questions about life began. These questions have not left me since then. From that day on my ideas about marches, and about the contents of that march, have changed. They have changed to the point that at times I find myself criticizing these forms of public representation in a radical way. And yet for someone — I am not talking about those who arrange their *identity* around these demonstrations or any duplicate of them — they could have the "same" importance that the anti-militarist march had for me. No, I am not trying to say what you are thinking. If one has no memory of the paths he

has taken in the radicality of his choices, then she ends up building tribunals, because this is what one builds by looking at the past as History, as an arranged warehouse of truth. If memory as religious testimony creates only flags and Common Sense, memory as the exploration of one's ideas and desires could cause the critique to grow into an opening of relationships as it increases in radicality.

This topic touches upon another, different but connected, that I consider very important.

When an individual, an anarchist incubates *dangerous* choices, choices that he profoundly stakes his life on, often he is moved to want to communicate that danger in language. This frequently leads her to give a tone of exaltation to what she communicates. But that's not all. All calm reflection, all lucid reasoning comes to be seen as a limit. Without considering the fact that certain expressions and practices are considered less important due to the smaller level of involvement they seem to imply. This hierarchical division reproduces the sad figure of the specialist.

But I don't want to dwell on this since it seems to be a well-known topic, but rather on the language.

Who knows why the determination and resoluteness of our paths cause us to lose that light "detachment" from ourselves that pushes us to rebel against every fixation, against all that is held sacred, including those that are hidden behind our singularity.

It seems that when the taste for rebellion seasons our life, it is bound to transform us into professionals of the shout, technicians of Exhortation. With the risk that precisely in that shout and exhortation — and not in the courageous impulse that precedes them — followings

and slogans will develop, which is to say the very opposite of rebellion. And what if the greatest strength were that which one expresses calmly, precisely because it cannot be quantified or represented?

I don't believe that destruction, a destruction that is itself creation, needs words that announce it with the arrogance of prophecy and the certainty of the Last Judgment. On the contrary, it seems to me that the latter are precisely what society proposes to us. Throngs of the resigned, as soon as they fool themselves into thinking they have taken a step beyond the void of their resignation, are quick to use rancorous invective. One often notices this even among anarchists, in so many, perhaps ironic, defenses of violence (and I am not talking about those that hide their inactivity behind a military ideology, who still exist and are in good company). As soon as one embarks on the path of open conflict with power, immediately there are the cumbersome words of the proclamation, the ridiculous attitude of the warrior.

Here again, maybe the relationship between memory and calmness can shed light on a part of the problem.

Someone might tell me that the reason is that, in fact, individuals have different "characters". There are those who are more reflective and those who are more impetuous. That's fine. But I have an inkling — which could maybe be explained with effort — that the problem cannot be resolved in this way. The difference is not between a reflective and a more fevered attitude, but rather between a rebellion that seeks in words for what it lacks in real strength and a conception of insurrection that has no need for fancy verbal crutches.

Why should we ever change our mental disposition and our attitude whether we are writing a flyer or storming the Bastille?

Rigor in all choices charms me — a total revolt that is not showy.

Perhaps it would be best not to speak about what charms us.

NOTHING TO OFFER

I think that by now it is fairly obvious that concepts such as militancy and propaganda imply a separation between one's ideas and one's daily life. Apart from its hateful kinship with military language, the term "militant" gives the feeling of a duplicitous activity, of a public costume to put on, of self-interested — perhaps also anonymous — *exemplariness*, of a sacrifice accomplished and demanded. "To propagandize" means to shape consent (the famous "winning people over to the Idea"). It means ten words to repeat. It means making oneself and others into objects for the realization of an End, the links in unity toward the Goal.

Now, in a time that is building a new and even more tyrannical ideology from the critique of ideology, no one is surprised that militants and propagandists find very little favor. It is clear that this widespread "hostility" does not carry the will to unite ideas and life within it. Rather, it is usually the result of a definitive seal placed on that separation.

Even among anarchists, false oppositions end up obscuring the view.

The renunciation of revolt and of the risk of experimentation and action is often hidden behind the refusal of militancy and politics. So much chattering about experimentation and the "lived" reproduces in what is called "daily life" the religious dutifulness which so many claim to despise. When an initiative requires too much commitment, when results are not seen, when the stake in play is high, bah, then it's all politics and propaganda. Better to go back to our customary practice (where all there is to "experiment" is the method

for repeating ourselves), our spaces, our relationships. In the end, it is not at all true that everything is to be destroyed.

Yes, I know, those who have always talked of changing the world have not changed what is really important — their life. But could this rigorous and charming intuition become a commonplace in the service of disguised resignation? And then, is it possible to subvert our lives without *at the same time* experimenting with the demolition of this world? To distinguish a before and an after means already accepting the easy solutions that they have always proposed to us.

Paradoxically, the sad Sunday storytellers, the blustering prophets of the *great day*, are now the first ones to speak of the “here and now”. But the “here and now” about which they tell their stories is not the *everything immediately* that wants to set fire to all distance and all calculation; it is an insignificant product of progressivism and good sense. And they talk of *changing life*. Poor Rimbaud.

But this was not really what I wanted to talk about. I will return to this topic in the future.

What I want to reflect on instead is the possibility of putting an end to the logic of adherence.

One often hears it said in anarchist circles that one does not want to win others over, that one is not interested in creating a following. But is this really so? Or does one seek consent, even if in a different way? For example, isn’t “coherence” often nothing more than a way to appear *credible*?

I believe that one can express her ideas and practices without falling into the shackles of adherence. What matters is that the determination to think for

oneself and to act in consequence spreads, not the *role* of the spreader. And yet, often we complain that certain acts alienate the sympathy of “the people” from us. I think that if someone believes that there is a disparity between what I say and what I do, if he shares my ideas, he should be the one to act differently and “better”. If someone loses confidence in me, I might be sorry, if I am sorry, because she has lost this confidence, and not because in this way it might affect the credibility of the ideas I support. When the union between thought and action is directed toward adherence, it is always alienated. What does it mean if someone becomes anarchist because someone knows about the “coherent” anarchists and wants to imitate them?

Ideas cannot be separated from the individuals who have them. But their unity should not become *exemplariness*. How do I say it: I want to put what I say into practice, but for myself, not in order to convince others of my ideas.

At best, “the people” are accustomed to considering anarchist ideas as one of the many proposals with which one can agree or not. This is what needs to be shattered. This means not making use of consent to destroy delegation, representation and authority (which is to say, this very same consent), but rather refusing to accept its blackmail. We have nothing to offer — this is what makes us different.

However, quite often there is confusion between the clarity of one’s own choices and the sharing with others. I am interested in sharing my ideas and doing so in such a way that others understand them. But the fact that they understand them does not at all mean that they are in agreement. I will seem like a banality, but it isn’t. How

many times does one talk and act in such a way that others agree, but not in a way that makes one's words and actions clear (even though I myself am the first to have doubts about this concept of clarity)?

Usually those who come to hate all consent give up expressing and spreading their ideas. But in its way, this is a safeguard. It is more *dangerous* instead to keep on stubbornly expressing oneself and at the same time to refuse adherence to one's self (or to one's group). All adherence needs to be consolidated and defended (by god, the images!), and this petrifies thought and regiments action. Seeking consent (in its thousand forms) means adapting oneself to the level of those whose agreement one wants. In this way, one is transformed into a badly made product for others.

But, they tell me, it is only possible to change with others. True. But that *with* for me can only mean *each one for herself*. I want *accomplices*, not herds. Otherwise, all that is left to share *with* is our slavery.

MORE, MUCH MORE

The managers of passivity have always imposed the false alternative: either immobility or the armed band. Anyone who escapes the role of normality has to be brought back by force in an emergency. The game has its rules: one either accepts domination or imitates it. In addition to the powers that are in office, this all suits those who, though they call themselves revolutionaries, would like to build a new state. “There is no political power without military power” was a catch phrase of order in the not too distant past. And military power is not just a hierarchical and authoritarian organization; it is also the performance of the conflict between the state and the armed party that would like all of us to be spectators, harmless fans ready to become a number around one or the other of the contenders — the stronger of which — the state — is certain of victory in the end.

The common terrain of this performed battle is that of sacrifice and of the slogan, of specialization and ideology. It is the loss of all joy and autonomy, the negation of every impassioned project of subversion. It is the separation that has occurred between daily life and the transformation of the existent, the fragmentation of the totality and its substitution with a supposed center to conquer and — the image reversed — to oppose. There is no political power without military power. Exactly. And the anarchists? If one wants to destroy political power itself, what does one do about military power? Nothing. Or better, one makes it the negative measure of the coherence of one’s theory and practice.

Now, these discussions seem to be tied to a reality of the 1970s [in Italy] that has since disappeared. Exercises

of historical memory as they call them. Nonetheless, here they are presenting themselves again in the face of the machinations — as buffoonish as they are infamous — of the attorney general of Rome. If the aim of this judicial construction were only the repression of the arrested anarchists and, more generally, all those investigated, the discussion would only aim at dismantling the manifestly absurd charges set in motion by the judges. But it is not just this. The judges are well aware that the anarchist organization of which they speak does not exist. They know that the model of the “armed band” — obtained by looking at themselves in the mirror — cannot be applied to relationships between anarchists. When individuals encounter each other on the basis of their affinity, starting from their differences, and develop initiatives without formalizing their unities, when they organize themselves, certainly, but never in rigid and vertical ways, these individuals could never be an “armed band”. And not just because they refuse clandestinity (a refusal nonetheless significant), but because they don’t accept being recruited into a structure — with whatever acronym and whatever program — that makes armed clash a separate reality with respect to the subversive totality. All this does not change when some anarchist, individually and taking on all her responsibility for himself, decides to use arms. On the contrary, going with the fantasy, even if all those investigated, or even all the anarchists in the world had — in addition to writing, discussing, making love, posting flyers, insulting the boss, deserting work, occupying spaces and plundering merchandise — used arms, this would still not make them an “armed band”. It is the powers that be who need to invent this. But, as I said, that is not

the only question here. To limit it to this means having only a partial understanding of the repressive project of the state.

What the judges hope to promote once again is the illusion that beyond survival and waiting the only option is the armed organization. In this way, the spectacle of the fighting parties, which is already itself worn out, puts any insurrectional discourse out of play. If anyone who wants insurrection is a Leninist in disguise (and the police theory of double levels is a real gem in this regard), change could only — on penalty of otherwise being made out to be “terroristic” — be gradual, in short, democratic. Here it is. From the immediate aim of hindering a few dozen anarchists for as long as possible, this construction moves on to the far more serious goal of extinguishing all subversive tension, every attack on the state and capital. This concerns everyone and no anarchist can be called safe. Luckily the insurrection is not what the repressive organs believe.

In a world in which the forces of domination and alienation are increasingly united together, in which commodity production, total control of space, advertising's fabrication of false needs and the systematic negation of desire are inseparable parts of a single process — in such a world of terror, insurrection increasingly has the concreteness of the totality and the joy of impatience. From the moment in which there is no center of work and class, of hierarchy and obligation in this society, there is also no center that could assault it. And this is why the masters of separation want to enclose us in a band, to replace real change with false images.

A revolutionary project is a collective movement of individual realization or it is nothing. Either it

composes, as Fourier said, an immediate elevation of the pleasure of living, or it is a sham. Anyone who poses as a specialist in arms is an enemy. The revolutionary feast is not an “armed struggle”, because it is much more. The more ample, conscious and impassioned the subversive transformation is, the less essential the military struggle is. It is passivity that creates the armed organization and *vice versa*. The theorem of the state is, therefore turned inside out. The false need for the armed band is born from political and union control, from the reformist ornamentation of daily misery. From the practical theory of insurrection creative action is born, the poetry of life that liquidates obedience to the bosses, that unites in difference and arms everyone against power, sacrifice and boredom. And desire armed will turn the world upside down.

As you see, master judges, the game is much more dangerous.

TO EACH HIS NOTHING

We are quick to speak of the individual. To one person, only her own individuality is of interest. Another says that, of course, it is necessary to start on an individual level, but in order to achieve a collective dimension. Still another states that revolutionary discourse is a discourse of community, that the singular is a powerless abstraction. Then there is the one who becomes an industrial executive, and he is individualist. Then there is the other one who, not knowing what to do with her life, hesitates; whatever happens, she hesitates. There are so many fiery and hollow debates on this subject. Here there is Stirner and there Bakunin. Here there is social anarchism, while there in the background, nihilism and empty rebelliousness is hiding. Nietzsche and the overman, Libero Tancredi and fascism. Plato called them embellishments of the void. I have founded my debate on nothing, the hermeneutic version of the Stirnerian cry.

The territory is much too crowded to seek any space for thought, to develop any reflection that extends from the hasty labels to the concrete reality of life where the game is actually played. Ignoring the details and pushing one's way through with an impatient gesture — this is the method.

One will discover that there is quite little to invent, except what use to make of the theoretical and practical insights of the past. Choosing how to use them in life, how to combine them in new explosive mixtures. The intelligence of experimentation consists in making elements that have always been separate play together, removing them from the gallery of fragments in order to thoroughly grasp their possibilities.

Outside of worn out debates and academic systemization, there are at least a hundred and fifty years in which the theory and practice of subversion suggest to us the decisive importance of understanding individual existence in its concreteness, i.e., in its totality. There are the concrete rebellions of the exploited that have set fire to the foundations on which the ideological constructions of power are based.

In the middle of the 19th century, the desire to overturn the world brought the division between the I and the surrounding reality into question. Stirner said that the unique one does not exist without ownership, in other words, that the individual does not exist without her own world, without his own relationships. Ownership is the having place itself for the existence of the individual, and therefore her capacity to understand and act, his passions and strength. For this very reason, affirming individuality means changing the world. All this — brought together — cannot be expressed in concepts. It needs to realize itself in life, because the life of each unique one is the content of a theory. At the same time, a subterranean path that leads from Hölderlin to Lautréamont makes the necessity of transforming art explode out from a practice of contemplation into a means for changing oneself and one's environment. With Fourier, the environment ceases to be a neutral space and becomes the place of desire, reality inseparable from the state of mind and relationships between human beings. Intervening in an environment means profoundly changing oneself. The christian and Cartesian separation between interiority and exteriority is removed by the passion for a new way of being together. The lie of private property

makes the individual into a mutilated and stunted reality from which a world has been taken away. This lie collapses along with authority. Bakunin speaks of the revolution of 1848 as “a feast without beginning or end”, bringing the Stirnerian critique of sacrifice onto the field of insurrectional action. The Russian revolutionary recommends to the Dresden insurgents that they place the paintings from the museum on the barricades in order to discourage the advance of the soldiers, magnificently understanding the meaning of the refusal of art as a separate sphere. Attacks against property, the destruction of statues, open revolt against the government and the attempt to change the order of a city — with the Paris Commune — is the historical action of this practical theory. And we have only reached 1871. More than a century of theoretical and practical experience separates us from this date, experience in which the liberation of individuals has appeared in its concreteness.

The critique of the commodity and the actions of anarchist expropriators, Malatesta's reflections on the necessity of insurrection and the Russian soviets, dada and the Council movements in Germany and Italy, early surrealism and the Spanish revolution, the negation of bureaucracy and the Budapest Commune, the critique of city planning and the revolt of Los Angeles, some contributions from the Situationist International and the French May, the refusal of work and the most extreme experiments of the 1970s in Italy. These are unfinished episodes — which often lacked the theoretical awareness of their practice — that still aspire to their realization.

But, as always happens, when ideas don't become reality, they rot and end up in the opposing basket. Thus, all the philosophy of the 20th century, from Husserl through Heidegger up to now, tells us that the human being is his world, that the Cartesian subject does not exist, that to understand, to interpret and to act are the same thing — in short, everything that the barricades had been teaching for some time. But, and here is the price paid, along with the Cartesian subject, the specialists of separated thought have also taken away the “who” of any revolutionary discourse. They have sold us capitalist existence as the full range of possible existence. They have critiqued technical reason in order to leave us at the mercy of a poetic speech purged of every risk. In the same way, the poets of the last seventy years only describe the excess of life over poetry, the novel lives for its end and administers the explosion of the “I” that Joyce had already represented. After all, “we could consider them good for another hundred years.”

Studies of the past accumulate. One lingers there over historiographic details. New cultural fashions are mimicked and increasingly the subversive meaning of an awareness that cannot be separated from the way it is used gets lost. Because this is precisely the point: to know what to do with it. Otherwise, one will continue to oppose the individual to others, to speak only of individual liberation (without realizing that this alone is as great as the universe), to separate the various aspects of domination (the exploitation of time, the control of space, psychological conditioning, impassioned misery) and therefore those of revolt (the overthrowing of authority, the destruction of commodity relationships, the conscious transformation of the environment, the

affirmation of desires). And then there can be individualists, social anarchists, communists, acratists, libertarians or skeptics. There is an entire world available to every one of us. Of definitions and boredom.

PATIENCE

In my opinion, many of the misunderstandings relating to democratic management originate in the ambiguity of the concept of social consensus.¹ The following paragraph contains a line of reasoning that is now widespread among a good number of anarchists.

When the foundation of the society of domination was visibly the brutality of force., the meaning of the practice of revolt was obvious to the exploited. If they did not rebel, it was precisely because the blackmail of the police and of hunger constrained them to resignation and misery. Therefore, it was necessary to act with determination against this blackmail. Now, however, state institutions benefit from the participation of the masses, however induced, since a high pressure operation of conditioning has made them consent. For this reason revolt should be shifted onto the plane of delegitimation, of the gradual and broadening erosion of social consensus. Consequently, it is by starting from these little zones where authority has lost its legitimacy, has been put in parentheses so to speak, that we could make a project of social transformation grow. Or else rebellion becomes an end in itself, in the best of cases, a useless and misunderstood gesture of witness, in the worst of cases, a contribution to repression and a dangerous departure from the real needs of the exploited. It seems to me that this is the substance of a discussion that at different times gets dressed up in a thousand different ways.

In reality, this entire line of reasoning is based on a false presupposition, that is, on the separation of social consensus and repression. It is clear that the state needs

both of these instruments of control, and I believe that no one falls into the insipid error of denying it. But recognizing that power cannot stand with the police alone, or with the television alone, is not enough. What is important is to understand how the police and the television relate to each other.

Legitimation and coercion only seem to be different conditions when social consensus is thought of as a kind of immaterial apparatus that shapes the materiality of command; in other words, when one thinks that the production of a specific psychological behavior — that of acceptance — lies somewhere other than in the structures of exploitation and obligation that are based on such an attitude. From this point of view, whether any such production happens earlier (as preparation) or later (as a justification) is irrelevant. The thing that is of interest is that it doesn't happen at the same time. And this is where the separation of which I spoke is placed.

In reality, the division between the inner sphere of consciousness and the practical sphere of action only exists in the heads — and the projects — of priests of every stripe. But in the end even they are forced to give their heavenly fantasies an earthly terrain. Just as Descartes had to make the pineal gland into the place where the soul rested, so the bourgeoisie designated private property as the stronghold of their impoverished sanctified I. In a similar manner, the modern democrat, not knowing where to place social consensus, has recourse to the vote and the opinion poll. As the last one to arrive, the up-to-date libertarian situates the delegitimizing practice in a “non-state public sphere” with mysterious boundaries.

Social consensus is a commodity just like a hamburger or the need for prison. Indeed, if the most totalitarian society is the one that knows how to give chains the color of freedom, it has become the commodity *par excellence*. If the most effective repression is the sort that blots out the very desire for rebellion, social consensus is preventative repression, policing of ideas and decision. Its production is material like that of the barracks or the supermarket. Newspapers, television and advertising are powers equal to banks and armies.

When the problem is posed in this way, it becomes clear how so-called legitimation is nothing other than command. Social consensus is force, and its imposition is exercised through precise structures. This means — and here is the conclusion that no one wants to draw from it — that it can be attacked. In the contrary situation, one would be clashing with a phantom that, once it is visible, has already won. Our possibility for acting would be completely one with our impotence. I could certainly strike this realization of power, but its legitimation always arrives — from where no one knows — before and after my attack and nullifies its meaning.

As you can see, one's way of understanding the reality of domination gives rise to one's way of conceiving revolt. And vice versa.

Participation in power's projects has become more widespread and daily life is increasingly colonized. City planning renders police control partially superfluous and virtual reality destroys all dialogue. All this increases the necessity for insurrection (it certainly doesn't eliminate it). If we were to wait for everyone to become anarchists before making revolution,

Malatesta said, we'd be in trouble. If we were to wait for the delegitimation of power before attacking it, we'd be in trouble. But fortunately, waiting is not among the risks of the insatiable. The only thing we have to lose is our patience.

1. The Italian word consenso can mean consensus, particularly in the sense of social consensus, or consent. In the text, I choose which term to use based on the context.

WORDS, RIGHTS AND THE POLICE

The right to free speech is a lie. First, because it is a right and as such only acts to reinforce the power of those who have the authority to grant it or recognize it (which is the same thing). Second, because it is put in place when the possibility of *speaking*, of saying something to someone who is able to understand it, no longer exists. In other words, it appears *afterwards*, when the condition which it tries to safeguard is already suppressed. Third, because it is separated from the practical possibility of action and is therefore only an abstraction that serves other abstractions. Deprived of the oxygen that only the space of relationships and confrontations, and thus of communication and experimentation, assures to them, ideas remain powerless, gasping on the shore of opinions that talk about everything and change nothing. I would like to express a few thoughts about this last aspect.

Showing its ability to tolerate words (with a few exceptions for subversive ones), democratic power has created a “free” zone in which to conceal their responsibility by transforming them, precisely, into opinions. For example, what does a politician do? He speaks. Of course, he exploits, he oppresses, he kills. But he is not the one who pulls the trigger. He is not the one who forces you to need money to survive. He is not the one who throws you down from the scaffolding. He is not even the one who makes the double lock that locks in any of your acts of rebellion. When he appears, he merely discusses, responds politely to questions, smiles at criticisms, adds, refutes and amends. It almost seems that by speaking better than him (which doesn’t take

much), reasoning more correctly (which takes even less) and undermining his defensive arguments, our idea of freedom might win. And journalists? Could someone maybe shoot someone else because she has different ideas than ours? One moment. He defends an act of war, praises a *carabinieri* operation that will send several dozen north Africans back home, asks a judge to apply the maximum penalty, convinces our political friends (or is convinced by them) that thirty-five years of work is not so very much, explains to us that the reason for a recent ecological disaster was the lack of laws, attacks a corrupt industrialist in order to avoid telling us that they all are, causes us to worry about an adulterated food product (never telling us which one isn't) in order to hide the reasons for a revolt in China, in Palestine or in an Italian prison. In short, she plays with adjectives on other people's hides. So what? Would one want to attribute the responsibility for all that happens in the world to a fabricator of syllables? It is necessary to take it out on those who act, not with those who speak. Fine. But who *acts*? We don't know, we don't see, and when he appears, he counts for nothing. So it is really true, as revolutionaries have always said, that social conditions are the cause of oppression. Magnificent. But there is something wrong when the masters themselves are saying this. By doing so, they hide their own responsibility in the generalized irresponsibility. There is something wrong when everyone is forced to act without considering the consequences (who could predict or even recognize them in such a *complex* world?), with freedom as the alibi. And year after year, these consequences produce an abundance of new causes.

If bureaucracy and administration — the power of Nobody — are ruling, if a slave can no longer see who is commanding her, then tyranny has nearly perfected itself. Also one of the best defense weapons — treating the scoundrels who “speak” like the scoundrels who “act” — appears to be almost entirely blunted. The right to free speech. But who can argue that “acting” is always more fraught with responsibility than, for example, writing? Why condemn the one who, blinded by his phantoms, suddenly kills a prostitute or a transsexual, and absolve the one who, in the calm enclosure of his library, appeals to history for some arguments to justify *in words* some military aggression against a category of Enemies of the fatherland and of democracy? Why desire the use of force against one who beats up immigrants while merely “energetically denouncing” anyone who provides cultural, social and even economic reasons for the beatings *in words*?

Was Eluard so different from the Stalinist murderers whose praises he sang in poems — that is to say, in elegant words that were not only said, but were said with the suitable form and rhythm? And the exploited person who speaks as a racist because he is afraid of losing not just his job, but also the *security* of his exploitation? And the exploiter, giving and taking away this security from the height of his power, who speaks of antiracism? And the one who writes for the one who speaks (who composes speeches for some statesman, for example), is he *twice* as safe for this reason? And what about the one who speaks *after* acting?

Personally, I recognize the *right* of someone to support tyranny in words to the same extent that I acknowledge the *right* to tyrannize. I place the journalistic defenders

of state terrorism hit by a bullet on the same level as cops or fascist squad members who are killed. Risks of the trade. Anyone who speaks or writes like a scoundrel is a scoundrel, so much more so since the cultural means available for understanding how despicable it is to pay such tribute to the master are better. I don't make concessions for what an exploited person says. And I don't change positions toward an exploiter, regardless of what he says.

And anarchists? Here it starts to get painful. To give an example, a representative of a leftist party was invited to an anarchist initiative. Why was he invited? This already deserves some discussion. But there he is, he takes the microphone and speaks. Someone disagrees and doesn't allow him to speak. It's simple, this someone is a fascist. He doesn't accept confrontation — his reasons are lacking. Freedom of speech is sacred for anarchists. One moment. I am that someone. I don't lack reasons (few are needed), but they don't come into it. If the party representative were to have a meeting on the immense beauty of anarchy, it would change nothing. Just as it would change nothing if he were to participate in the organization of the initiative without speaking. What he says at the moment is not in question, but what he does with words and what he says with actions. He himself is in question. I am still of the opinion that those who power tolerates are not to be tolerated at our initiatives. In confronting them, rather than turning to dialogue, I prefer *the practice of merited insult*. And if Prodi or even Agnelli were to come to speak, and someone were to jump on them, would this mean that Capital has more reasons than subversion? Would this someone also be a fascist, because she didn't wait for

them to finish speaking before jumping on them? The usual exaggeration, everybody knows that they are rogues. So the “right to free speech” is not for everyone (fascists included), but only for those whose liabilities are *acceptable* (a Parlato for example)? As is clear, there is something else. In fact, the party representative is not even attacked in words (with Reasons). On the contrary, they do conferences together, he is asked to write the foreword of some book, he marches nearby in protest marches. At the front, the police (these ones of few words) that our leftist friend defends in the columns of his newspaper or in some chamber of the republic.

Okay now, in this family photo, I think I recognize it better. It is right in the middle, the right to free speech.

THE TWO FACES OF THE PRESENT

One cannot enter twice into the same river
— Heracleitus

What's new? There's Clio
— A Renault advertisement

The totalitarian dream of power is to make us bathe not twice, but thousands of times in the same river. The governors of time want to force us to survive within the walls of an eternal present — the social measurement of a continuous and collective deferment of life to the future.

What happened today? The images of products on advertisements changed. Some different faces appeared on television and an identical commentary gathered facts in a different order. A statesman disappeared into the void that is absence in the news after forty years in government. For forty years, it was a difficult enterprise not to come across his name at least once a day — now he has become a perfect Carneade. What happened today?

Capital has managed to make almost all the activity of individuals nearly identical day after day. The way in which they dream of doing something different (the career, the unexpected prize, fame, love) is also identical. But bodies, though malnourished and atrophied, are different from each other and from themselves from one moment to the next. Everything that has happened can even be reconstructed and rewritten ("one never knows what the past reserves for us" as a worker under the Stalinist regime commented), but bodies are not recuperated, not yet.

Power has made recycling, in all senses, its proper practice and ideology. The science of transplants — which an effective euphemism calls “the frontiers of medicine” — has been working for some time so that the exchange of parts insures an ever-longer survival to the social machine that is the human body. Like all the other property of the state domain, individual existence obeys only one imperative: to endure. For anyone who produces (automobiles or rights, resignation or false critiques, it matters little), domination is quick to replace an arm, a liver, a heart. In the name of progress any organ of anyone who is no longer of service can be easily sacrificed. On the other hand, as a doctor favorable to transplants said, “If someone is clinically dead, why waste all that good stuff?”

Human beings whose opinions are interchangeable, just like the performances carried out during work and “free time”, must have the bodies they deserve. This serial world wants everything to be in its image and likeness.

Only religion is left to talk of tomorrow (ideologies, as is well known, are all dead). Capital, however, speaks of today, speaks of that which must be bought and sold now. But at bottom they say the same thing. The first distances happiness, the second brings misery close. For both, the future is the thing that is always the same, for which one sacrifices the previous day that becomes the present. The next day, one starts again.

What happened today?

Living beyond laws that enslave, beyond narrow rules, even beyond theories formulated for the generations to come. Living without believing in earthly paradise. Living

*for the present hour beyond the mirage of future societies.
Living and feeling existence in the fierce pleasure of social
battle. It is more than a state of mind: it is a way of being,
and immediately.*

— Zo d'Axa

Quick

— graffiti from May '68 in France

The struggle against oppression is merely the indispensable minimum of an insurrection that wants to lay hold of life. It is now that one plays the game, not tomorrow or the day after. Our lives are much too short and there have never been so many kings' heads to chop off.

The unsuccessful realization of militance has produced its wretched counter-image everywhere. There is no longer anyone speaking of the duties to the Cause and promising the future society. All are for the "here and now", quick to accuse every discussion and every practice that does not guarantee the security of the known and approved here and now of martyrdom and messianism. On sale today is militance in its most laicized version: realism.

To those who talk of wanting to enjoy life without concerning themselves over the oppressors, one can only respond in one way: by watching how they live. One will discover how much they accept the way the oppressors concern themselves over them.

The one who does not hide the limits and impositions by which she is constrained knows that, beyond empty proclamations, one can be outside of that which exists only to the extent to which she is against it. Precisely

because he wants much more, he launches herself into the struggle.

When she lacks the strength, he has no need of an ideology of pleasure to disguise his weakness and fear. They exist and are part of the game as well, like love and hatred, relationships torn away from exchange value and actions that spit in the face of the order of passivity.

My ideas, my activity and my body are not those of yesterday, nor of everyone — so she desires to think and feel. Today something happened. Each day he must release her own unique perfume from the impersonality — now secretly, now with the roar of the tempest. Then one can speak of tomorrow as well. As it is currently written for us, there is only slavery behind the imperative: Attend to the future.

In a time that is always the same, the rulers of survival want to impose their measure on each and all. The immeasurability of our demands is the only true necessity of a change much more than necessary, and that is to say, possible.

Today something happened.

THE BACK SIDE OF HISTORY

Putting the past back in play in order to make an adventure of the future. I believe that the reasons for keeping past theoretical and practical experiences from becoming material for historians are contained in this perspective.

History is always the history of the masters, and this is not just because, as is well known, they are the ones who write it, but also because this world, their world, forces us to look at it through its own eyes. The organizers of obedience have always used the past for police and propaganda purposes, but this did not keep them from knowing it. On the contrary, precisely this knowledge has allowed power to unite events in the coherence of control, sacrifice and repression. For the past to carry out its function as an argument for the current society, it is necessary, as a minimum, to know what to *remove*, which is to say, the most significant reasons and episodes of the struggles of the exploited — everything that history presents merely as defeats. The exploited, on the contrary, have rarely been able to reduce history to a dull chronology — or to a calendar vision with so many dates to celebrate — in order to find another coherence for it, that of revolt, and so to understand the motives, the most radical motives and the limits of the latter.

The apologists for domination have obviously not given up rewriting the past, but they are increasingly unfamiliar with it. In a world where one responds to every cause for malaise with a remedy that is even worse and that *guarantees* only the complete irresponsibility of the one who applies it; where the passivity of work is extended into “free time” through the contemplation

of a screen (television or the computer); in which the masters themselves — powerful because of the submission that is conceded to them in the hope that they, at least, know where this world is going — are that much more self-assured because they have increasingly mad the law, “as long as it lasts” their own — in such an idiotic world that desires *eternity*, the past has no meaning. Now, if, on the one hand, this reinforces the totalitarianism of the present society (outside of me there is nothing), on the other hand, it renders its administrators more stupid. For the moment, since they can allow it. The intelligence — even historical — of a strategy of preservation is proportional to the dangers of revolt.

On the same level (here is why I said that one looks at history with the eyes of the masters), even subversives have felt “freer” once relieved of the weight of knowledge of the past. This is the idea that history (not just that of specialists, but even that which does not separate ideas and actions, that is written out of desire and that arms the intelligence) ends up imprisoning life. What goes unnoticed is just how *historical* this idea is. (What is the difference whether a reflection originates from reading what someone has said or whether it originates in knowing what someone has done? Let’s think of it as so many individuals together. Why is the first reflection considered, for example “philosophy”, while the second is considered “history”? In my opinion, there is no distinction.) Paraphrasing a well known aphorism, one can only say that the present ignorance has retro-active value. Now, this ignorance has many faces, if, as is evident, its distributors are, above all, the historians (including those “of the movement”).

So as not to go on for too long, it is enough to consider all the advertising noise with regard to a film on the Spanish revolution. To many anarchists this did not seem right. At last, the black and red banner, the revolutionary union, the collectives, self-management, Durutti. Now, to tell the truth, we ourselves are speaking.

Personally, to make myself clear, I have nothing against the discussions and books about the Spanish revolution. But has all this talk about it contributed to making us understand this distant event *better* (and this “better”, for anarchists, would have to be in the sense of a *current* perspective)? Frankly, I don’t think so. It seems to me, on the contrary, to contribute more to mummification, to testimonial, to monumental history. As often occurs, the occasion predetermined the contents. Books on libertarian revolution have increased. And yet, what does one say about a revolutionary movement — not just Spanish — like that of the 1930’s? What would self-management of the factories mean now? What do we do about unions? To which places of capital could an insurrectional conception now be linked? How do we create the possibilities so that in the revolutionary moment it passes suddenly, without transition, to the destruction or radical transformation of these places? What does it mean, in reality, to overthrow authority, what does it mean to abolish the market? Only by posing questions like these does discussion of revolutionary Spain take on significance. Only in this way does it become an open question in itself. But one can understand little if one looks to it as the realization, however temporary, of an ideal. With such an approach, all that is left to do is to distribute the small images of the saints. And then, for

this celebration, it is necessary to dress up the events (even the bureaucratic control and the counter-revolution of leading “anarchists”) in their Sunday best. Why, for example, is so little known about the days of May 1937 in Barcelona? Why does no one speak of the calls from the *uncontrollables* who said that the “anarchist” ministers were reactionaries like all the rest, and that it was necessary to shoot them as well, just like all the others?

A few pages of history says more than an entire encyclopedia when the theoretical suggestion for a practice of reinventing it is read into the events themselves. One need only read in this way to know it. It would then be interesting to really reflect on the dirty trick and the mistakes (and also on the splendid, joyous strengths) of those days. To connect those days to other insurrections and to other errors. To connect them to the present. To give an example, one could reread the history of insurrectional movements through the fracture — moral rather than police-related — represented by money (one thinks of the refusal to attack banks, starting from the Paris Commune, passing through revolutionary Spain, ending up at the French May [1968]; or, on the other hand, of the expropriations by workers in insurgent Patagonia in the 1930's). Just as one can read it under the subterranean sign of gratuity and of the festival, or of amorous relationships. Or, or...

But those who attack property, silence leaders and shake up current social relationships without any aims, what might they tell us about individuals who tried to do this yesterday, the day before, or seventy years ago?

THE PRICE OF AN ENTIRE WORLD

Every day, this society of hierarchy and money produces violence and, at the same time, a fixed system of moral anesthesia with which to support it. The capacity to perceive it has become an endeavor as well as necessary condition of rebellion. Daily relations are a huge, complex game of disguising the brutality.

The first rule is to fragment the activities of individuals in such a way that it is impossible to perceive them in their unity. What would the worker think if he had the totality of causes and effects of his small repetitive gestures before his eyes all at once? The machines that she operates produce exploitation, poverty, pain, death. But only with an effort can one link the starving children in Africa that one saw on television with the raw materials that one uses and the products that one manufactures. Remaining focused on tiny push-buttons is an anesthetizing of awareness. The little bureaucrat who fills out forms for eight hours a day does not see the immigrant that he will deport when he is at home, because her name on that form is not there. He doesn't see who will end up in prison because she didn't agree with stamped papers. He has never locked the prison door on anyone, not him.

Passive contemplation toward a work activity that one goes through in complete unawareness is the same as that which chains one to the screen. The television viewer comes directly out of the factory or the office. She complains about her job just as he complains about the politician on TV. But if, while the latter spoke, one could see the people crushed by laws, killed by asbestos, bombed, mangled by barbed wire and tortured in

any police station, if one could collect the blood, the suffering behind the politician's trashy smile, what would happen?

The only violence that is perceived is that which is reported. The mafia kills for money. The citizen is indignant, and the more indignant she is, the more innocent she feels when she uses money (the great mafia). The terrorist puts bombs on trains. The citizen is indignant, and the more indignant he is the more he feels at home when he goes to vote (for the great terrorists). So many people, who earn money every day, take it to the bank and make their purchase at the supermarket, have never held a weapon, or made a threat, or wounded, or killed. They work in insurance, at the post office, at the custom-house or wherever; they are peaceful and love neither blood nor bullying. Clever people. They have never wanted to see violence, therefore they have never seen it.

The economy, in its abstractness, appears to move by itself. This is why money seems harmless. One doesn't see the violence among banknotes, thus it is not there. But one tries to reach out and grasp a product without giving its corresponding exchange value, its socially established value, its general equivalent, in short, money, in return. Suddenly, here is society recovering its calm from its pieces in the face of violated property. The capitalist, the judge, the police, the jailer, the journalist, the priest and the psychologist will come to its defense. They will tell you that the value of a thing is not your enjoyment, your activity or your need, but rather a mysterious social measure that grants a product to you only if you also accept its long train of flatterers, only if you accept the capitalist, the judge, etc. They will come

to teach you the value of work and the habit of seeing in things the time that must be stolen from you in order to have them — that is the money — and thus of making things sacred, of serving them, of measuring your value in relation to them and not the other way around. They will come to remind you that the respect for property is love for the human person, that if you think otherwise, you have mental or family problems, that maybe you are seeking the affection of your parents in theft, however you may have been helped, raised, educated, connected. They will come to try you, to imprison you. Or if you defend yourself, they will come to beat you, to shoot you, to kill you. Whenever anyone disrupts the habitual circulation of money, it is here, beneath the simulation, that the true face of the market appears: violence. “Stealing, robbing, how is it possible?” the citizen thinks, focused on her tiny push-button, on his files or on the television screen in front of him. Why illegal activity instead of work? Perhaps because by stretching out one’s hand directly for money, one snatches time — life — from the organization of the economy. One takes the possibility for doing as one pleases, for dreaming, for discussing, for loving, for creating one’s projects from the dead time of work. Less time for work, more time for destroying it. Money is time. One certainly does not escape exploitation and the commodity system by attacking property (to think this is once again to focus on one’s own pointing finger, thus, yet another ethical anesthetic). What one obtains, having the strength for it, is a few additional possibilities. When things are no longer measured with the yardstick of money (that is, of the extorted activity of sacrifice), they lend themselves better to experimentation, to the gift, to use, to

destruction. Work no longer appears only as the wage (the first of its chains), but as social organization, as an ensemble of relationships. Escaping the wage system — in the narrow sense — provides one with an additional tool (provided that one does not allow oneself to be enslaved by the money, by the *role* of robber, by specialization) in the struggle against the economy. But this struggle is either widespread or it is nothing. Only when looting becomes an extensive practice, when the gift arms itself against exchange value, when relationships are no longer mediated by commodities and individuals give *their own* value to things, only then does the destruction of the market and of money — which is all one with the demolition of the state and of every hierarchy — become a real possibility.

But when the authorities catch a glimpse of all these aspirations behind a robbery, they raise the price. If those who commit the robbery are anarchist individuals, the price goes up to the risk of shooting or being killed, up to the risk of losing the time one wanted to snatch from work in prison, up to all the additional time the magistrates have planned for them with the additional charge of “armed band”. The punishment increases. There is a theorem prepared for any comrade who individually decides to solve his money problem by committing a robbery, that would lock him up, even before he is put in jail, in a secret structure with leaders, treasurers and bookkeepers. Thus, the state presents an increasingly spiced-up account and tries to create an odious collective responsibility in order to turn us into the controllers of each other. Once again, illegal violence is reported to cover up the daily, legal violence. Where an anarchist is involved, the train of the flatterers of money

is even longer. The wares are even more costly, because what is in question is the very existence of capitalists, judges, police, jailers, journalists, priests, psychologists, bureaucrats, workers and robbers.

The surplus of repression is defending a whole world of prices. No price should seem too high.

SCATTERED THOUGHTS ON UTOPIA, SELF-MANAGEMENT AND HOSTILITY TOWARD THE EXISTENT

About utopia: between funeral dirges and desire

Every utopia is finished. The great ideals of change are dead (from self-consumption). So the chorus goes. Overcoming the annoyance that the endless repetition of these dirges causes me, I will try to develop a few thoughts. If by utopia one means an ideological construction in the name of which to subordinate individuals, a mission in view of which to perpetually postpone one's present passions, the phantom to chase for those who want to force everyone to dream the same dream — if utopia is all this, one can't help but rejoice in its disappearance. Sanctification and sacrifice are the territory of all tyranny, the magic circle of all oppression. But it is clear that there is something more.

First of all, no one can explain how utopia, defined in this way, could be looked upon as something external or out-dated in relationship to the present society. Sacrifice of the individual is the linchpin of the current social administration. The alienation of desire is the form in which its reproduction is carried out, the sameness of dreams is the nightmare of an increasingly real technological domination. Every day, it becomes more obvious how democracy spectacularly drums up its enemies for itself. In fact, modern social organization is safeguarded not on the basis of its results, but rather through a tested strategy of emergency and a skillful game of postponement. Everything that is outside of this system would have to be terrorism, delirium or madness. Through the ideological appeal to the struggle against phenomena

that are mystifyingly presented as external or marginal (mafia, drugs, fascism, etc.), the defense of the existent is organized: safe events, at times a few — substantially useless — obligations, a subtle distinction.

Also considering utopia as an ethical-political ideal that is unattainable in practice fits in perfectly with the ideology of the present social organization. Can a practice of power actually be attained that doesn't tend to reproduce itself by crushing everyone that it subjects? Is an ecological form of exploitation possible? Can one still peddle the neutrality of science without clashing with the weapons of derision? Then, concrete freedom within the state and capital is utopian.

Thus, the utopia that everyone is so quick to declare dead is not the shadow of totalitarianism, nor the continuous calls for a sublime abstraction, but rather the look beyond, the state of tension — not sacrificial, but desirous — that pushes beyond the place of authority, of the commodity, of work. It is that space where differences can live together without being overcome, where it is possible for contraries to act, where equality is not flattening, but the search for a threshold of affinity in which to realize our most singular potentialities. It is not a new taking root of politics, but a subversion that brings individuals where it is no longer possible for a human being to put down roots, and where, thus, there can be no politics which is merely like the smoke of someone's cigar (Henry David Thoreau, paraphrased).

Utopia is not traveled over by marching, as those who considered themselves a part of History thought, but by dancing, into the unknown of continuous excursions without a guide. And, above all, there are no guarantees or definitive conquests. There are no rights or

duties, no objective mechanisms or foundations (be it the State, the Community or Nature) that can save us from continual experimentation. The difference that the thought and practice of utopia carry is not the other term of a dialectic that produces (or concludes) History; it is not the necessary phase of an ascending movement in which all opposites are reconciled. It is artifice, permanent contrast, play. The basis on which the ruling order stands is not conflict, but rather the attempt to resolve conflicts in an authoritarian and coercive way, which develops into systemic construction. Anarchy — my anarchy, of course — is, thus, not the elimination of conflict, but its radicalization. The differences that need to be destroyed, let's say class differences, what are they if not the hierarchical overcoming of the differences between individuals? Refusing the former means affirming the latter. "Opposites come together; the most beautiful harmonies are formed through opposition; all things rise according to the clash" (Heracleitus).

Stones and fluids

The castle of mystification and ideological alienation, through which authority and exploitation have been established and, at times, legitimated, has been automated; this thought has often come to a-cratists, outsiders, all those who want to live without governing or being governed. One can realize, for example, that political parties are supposed to be subordinated to the media apparatus and not vice versa without even having recourse to the abused — and perhaps partially inadequate — notion of the Spectacle. The thing that may be overlooked is that it is the ability to communicate itself that has been made autonomous. "The thing

that hinders communication is communicability itself. Human beings are separated by what unites them” (G. Agamben).

In the face of continuous emergencies (unemployment, danger of the Right, etc.), widespread opinionism (meaning the ideology of the Opinion) and the mystique of the New, the defense of a critical intelligence imposes itself more and more as a basic element for any practice of active desertion from the mechanisms of domination. But it goes without saying that this is not enough. Rather continually enlarging the practical aspect in the name of a deep analytical examination, one finds oneself once again before thoughts and words that are “hard as rocks” (Nietzsche), and first among them all, the illusion of a cumulative knowledge that can clear out every possible error from the field of action. This illusion is one of the hardest to die. It often presents itself in new clothes. Even if some intend to overturn the epistemological framework and not to number and archive data (the defeat and poverty of every conception of counter-information are, in fact, before everyone’s eyes), the ideal of systematic classification isn’t slow to advance itself and the effort of rethinking the paths of liberation begins to be placed outside of daily practice. Affirming the necessary connection between thought and action is not merely an ethical necessity (an ethic, clearly, of desire and not self-sacrifice), but also the conviction that they are two poles that feed into each other like a fluid; action furnishes tools for reflection and vice versa. All the more so since intelligence is quick to settle into that Reason whose demands have always cancelled every difference, every excess of the body. Of course, the violence of Reason has often also assumed the

appearance of a myth of Praxis that has fettered so many hearts and led directly to dictatorships. There can't even be any guarantees in action. It is important to treasure all of the critical points that have been elaborated in the last several years, using them, for the most part, against the very intentions of the authors.

In view of the technological projects of the state and capital, intended to reduce and alienate the tools of language and knowledge more and more, any looting at the expense of the culture industry would have to be an important instance of individual growth. But it is not surprising, in the present poverty, to see professors and intellectuals who have highlighted opportunistic aspects of the idea of Progress — an idea that is completely within christian eschatology, since it presupposes and end to history — supporting the progressivist formulation. They have always said that the conception of a final end leads to concentration camps, and here they are on the side of the prison guards. All perfectly rational. The thing that should be a bit surprising, however, is that some anarchists place ungovernability among the evils of politics (I refer to the back cover of the Bookchin pamphlet, *La Democrazia diretta* [Direct Democracy], edited a few months ago by Elèuthera). The weight of Events will be.

The call of the *polis*

From at least the time of Macchiavelli on politics has meant the science of the exercise of power, along with the techniques by which authority is constituted and defended. In the attempt to re-create non-state public space, some have tried to revive another notion of politics, understood as community management,

self-government of the *polis*. This definition, proceeding through patterns, dates back to Aristotle. It is well-known that for him the human being is a political animal (*zoón politikón*, to be precise). Since human beings are social by nature, the sphere of the *polis* is identified with the realm of freedom. But for Aristotle, society is not solely the extension of natural needs and desires. The political realm doesn't just situate the spontaneous cooperation between human beings, it is also where the goal of the human being is realized. Or rather, we could say the Great Goal, the *Telos*. In this conception, politics is already a task, a mission and, in the final analysis, a separated activity. If the cult of the Common Good, as an aim to which to subordinate individual desires, is later added, we see politics (which is not the act of associating) already taking shape as domination. Wherever there is sacred duty, there is always sacrifice. Without taking anything away from the importance of rethinking the conceptual categories that are used, it may be worthwhile to recall that any subjection of the individual to the social machine — in the form of obedience to a state institution or to a hypothetical community assembly — is the worst of tyrannies, even when it is exercised by the absolute majority. Without being mistaken, some have glimpsed in the Aristotelian doctrine the christian-liberal religions to come, the dire shadow of civilization's claws.

The poverty of guarantees

When I hear talk of the need to come up with propositions and escape isolation, my most spontaneous reaction is wariness. And this is not only because usually escape from the ghetto and concreteness of action are

ideological extortions through which flattening and assimilation are justified (far too often, somebody tries to pass conformism off as mental openness and the reduction of differences to nothing as the refusal of sectarianism). Another thing that makes me suspicious is the feeling that at the base of this discourse there is a psychological need for guarantees. This need doesn't only conceal the old quantitative illusion, or the equally old ideology of the united front (perhaps now against the danger of the Right). Above all, it conceals the inability — that everyone feels to varying degrees — to think beyond what exists. I believe that many of these features exist in libertarian municipalism. The administration techniques toward which state-capitalist rule is heading are taking form increasingly as a system of relationships based on participation. The management of the territory is entrusted to forms of relative self-management on both the political and the economic level. Technological possibilities permit the realization of social control and the reproduction of the existent through widespread voluntary work and grassroots associationism. Without wanting to analyze the changes that have occurred within the productive dimension and work organization, I am interested in highlighting, through some spur to thought, how municipalist theory places itself on the terrain of recuperation.

I don't find it hard to believe that it might be a successful conception. When one abandons the path of revolt against the existent — one always conquers.

Municipalism and integration

The *logos*, so Heracleitus suggested, is the true common element for human beings. Their capacity to

use language is the trait that unites them. But it unites them in difference. If *one* universal reason truly existed, communication would be impossible, since everyone would know the thoughts of others as well as his own. It is the singularity of reasons that pushes human beings to communicate. What the state and capital have alienated and rendered autonomous (and this is something more than a fetish of images) is the linguistic element itself, the common space. Real community (that is, I repeat, community among *different* beings) has now been transformed into its imitation. Technology is building virtual communities as an integrated escape from an increasingly intolerable world. It's not a question of mere machines (that some people's promethean dream of liberation predicts will be able to be used differently), but of an entire social organization. Our lives are drawn into increasingly anonymous containers. This anonymity, as has been noted, is paradoxically achieved only after being put on file, i.e., only after having furnished one's (fictitious, mercantile, legal) identity. From the moment that human relationships are entirely mediated by work (understood not only as wage labor, but as usefulness to society), and the environment is more and more an advertising product, a non-place, the search for identity moves toward collective projections, toward public spheres in which to recognize oneself. This is the source of the violent revival of localism, of ethnic claims; in brief, of communitarian ideology. The municipalist proposal is precisely the attempt to reestablish a communitarian space where no community is now possible. This proposal presumes the conviction that ways of self-management (meant not so much as a method of struggle, but as a form of social organization)

are possible, maybe no longer starting from the centrality of the factory, but from the centrality (take note: social centers) of occupied spaces and other forms of libertarian experimentation. What is not recognized is that the management itself (the administration) of the territory is a dimension of Power. The same for production. Where time can be measured, there is service, there is Work — even if it doesn't assume the traits of wage payment. Consumption itself is work. Technology and urban planning are also based on alienation and on control of the individual, on the violence of mediated relationships and on the sacrifice of creativity.

Self-management or the destruction of the existent

In a lot of the talk about self-management, it may be precisely the most radical question that has been side-stepped. That is to say: what is the who to which self-management refers, who is the self that this concept points out? Banally, all the existing structures, from voluntary workers' groups to state institutions, are self-managed. For those who don't want to rebuild a new oppression or integrate into the present form, self-management can only become the dimension — relational, of course — of the individual. The individual is self-managing if she is the owner of her times and if he can participate in the creation of his space. In a word, if she can have relationships of mutuality. Within a high-tech territory dominated by mediation, to which the presence of the state and capital is giving shape, this perspective can only be one of active defense, of attack. As excess of desire, as love of the quest.

In a world that is increasingly being transformed into a terrifying virtual glove, for anyone who wants to pass

through the nonviolence of destruction, this ancient wisdom offers valuable comfort: "Anyone who does not hope for what cannot be hoped for will not find it, since he is closed to the quest, and no road leads there" (Heracleitus). Where knowledge refers to an intuition, to a conception of a way to go. Perhaps utopia is precisely this: not a destination, but a path.

IN THE OPEN AIR — NOTES ON REPRESSION AND RELATED MATTERS

The notes that follow spring from a need: that of reflecting together on the current situation with the aim of finding the thread of a possible perspective. They are the fruit of various discussions in which the critical balance of past experience, the dissatisfaction with endeavors of struggle now going on and hope for existing potentialities blended together. They are not the line of one group in competition with another. Nor do they have any pretense or illusion of filling the voids — of life and projectual passion — with any more or less formal agreement on a few theses. If they contain unpleasant critiques, it is not for the sake of advancing them as an end in itself, but rather because I believe that it is still necessary to say unpleasant things. Like all the words in this world, they will only find an echo in those who feel a similar need. In short, a small basis for discussion in order to reach an understanding of what we can do, and with whom.

«We must abandon all models, and study our possibilities.»
— E. A. Poe.

We know from experience that one of the greatest powers of repression is that of spreading confusion and instilling distrust in others as well as in ourselves, or else of determining rigid attachments to identity and more or less paralyzing suspicions. In this sense, it would be best to examine certain problems in depth as soon as possible. Difficult years lie ahead that will shake up many of our mental and practical habits. If it is true that

the most dangerous prejudice is that of thinking one has none, I would still prefer that these notes get criticized for what they say, without preconceived interpretations. Such a desire will explain their tone and even their style.

An Uninhabitable House

The condition in which we find ourselves seem to me to be that of someone who barricades herself inside four walls in order to defend a space in which no one has any desire to live. So much discussion of opening out, of expansion, of alliance, hides the fact that we are defending a tumbledown house in an uninhabitable neighborhood. It seems to me that the only way out is to set fire to the defense posts and go out into the open air, shaking off the moldy odor. But what does this mean beyond the metaphor?

The age in which we live is so lavish with disruption that our very capacity to interpret, and still more, prefigure events is collapsing beneath the rubble. If this is valid for all revolutionaries, the visions of the world and of life based on authoritarian and quantitative models have come out in particularly bad shape. The more or less knowing managers of other people's struggles manage only useless political representations of already pacified conflicts; the struggles that burst through pacification don't leave any space for managers. The illusion of the party — in all its variants — is now the corpse of an illusion.

The spreading out, aligning and breaking up of forces on the field, in small as well as great conflicts, becomes increasingly mysterious. The thing that has always been our distinctive trait — a nonhomogenous, non-cumulative vision of force, a repugnance for the dictatorship

of the Number — corresponds in part to the current social conditions and to the unpredictable possibilities for rupture that these conceal. From the transformation of the ruling order itself — through its network of structures, technologies and knowledge — to events like the guerrilla struggle going on in Iraq, we can draw some lessons. It seems clear that conflicts occur less and less in the form of the confrontation between two armies or fronts, and more and more in the form of a myriad of widespread and uncontrollable actions. A ruling order made of thousands of centers of vital points pushes its enemies to make themselves more unpredictable. Thus, a non-centralized way of conceiving actions and relationships is not only more libertarian, but also more effective against the nets of control. If such an awareness exists on a theoretical level, we don't always manage to maintain it in practical proposals. On the one hand, we affirm that power is not a general headquarters (but rather a social relationship), but on the other hand we propose endeavors that depict it as just that. I think that we have to start seeking the forms of action most fitting to our characteristics, to our (quantitative and qualitative) strengths. Unfortunately, we still think that acting in small groups must necessarily mean acting in isolation. This is why, in the face of the arrest of comrades and the more general increase of repression, the usual proposals always come out: the rally, the march, etc. Of course, it isn't a matter of criticizing these forms of action as such, but the mentality that usually goes along with them. In certain contexts — at present, particularly, local ones — , the march or rally might have their meaning as part of a series of endeavors. But when this weaving together of various forms of actions is lacking,

and especially when we are thinking within the narrow circle of comrades, I think that repeating certain models ends up creating a sense of powerlessness and reproducing the wellknown mechanism of more or less militant set dates. Here as well, there is a need for fresh air. Even by organizing with a hundred, if we want, we can intervene in interesting ways in rather huge marches. But if there are just a hundred and that is all, let's ask, why a march? What can a hundred comrades do in a city where they know the key points well? What do all the struggles going on around the world that are rediscovering a passionate and potentially subversive use of the blockade have to teach us?

Many have become aware that the problem of repression cannot be reduced to the sphere of revolutionaries. Repression — both direct and indirect — involves ever broader portions of the population. It is the response of a ruling order that feels the earth slipping under its feet, aware of how wide the gap between general dissatisfaction and the capacities of its historical servants (the parties and unions) is becoming. Without looking into the reasons for all this here, it is enough to say that subversives speak so much about prisons because it is so much easier to end up inside, and at the same time, they feel the need not to limit themselves, within the totality of life, to the defense of their arrested comrades. Here problems arise. If we can only oppose repression as it relates to those on which it falls, then everyone will defend her own friends and comrades, those with whom he shares ideas passions and projects — and this is unavoidable. Solidarity against repression that strikes revolutionaries with whom we don't have any affinity has to be quite clearly distinguished from support for

political projects we don't share that are downright anti-theoretical to our anti-political desires. Now, the more we limit the sphere of our endeavors to revolutionaries, the more we risk precisely giving a hand to reviving authoritarian theories that are fortunately in ruins. On the other hand, the broader this sphere is, the easier it seems to be to distinguish the two levels (that of solidarity against and that of solidarity with, i.e., complicity). It is therefore rather astonishing that, despite awareness of the social and universal range of the repressive blade, the "solution" proposed from most sides is unity of action among ... the revolutionary elements. In this way, we don't just isolate ourselves from the rest of the exploited who feel the weight of social control and policing like us, but we also fool ourselves about an important facet: such "unity of action" has a price (maybe not immediately if the relationships of force are favorable, but certainly in the long run). If, instead of one hundred anarchists, there are one hundred fifty people involved in an endeavor because fifty Marxist-leninists join in, and to accomplish this, we have to sign manifestoes and flyers written in a relatively impenetrable jargon, is this really about "expansion"? Wouldn't it possibly be more meaningful for even just ten people to organize an endeavor that confronts problems felt by many and expresses contents closer to our way of thinking and feeling? As to the solidarity that relates specifically to comrades inside, quite different forms exist...

I don't want this attitude to be interpreted as an "ideological closure" or as a search for hegemony over other groups. Precisely in order to avoid reasoning in terms of acronyms, strained ideological interpretations and formalism, it is best to keep our proposals broad and

clear, without any particular political groups acting as spokespeople, but rather everyone who feels involved speaking for herself. After that anyone who wants to participate as an equal among equals is welcome. If other revolutionaries apply the same methods, it will benefit everyone. There is an atmosphere of alliance based on reciprocal favors that I find unbreathable. United fronts, unity of action among revolutionary forces — quite apart from any specific objective of struggle in which anyone who was interested could meet together, whether comrades or not — are a part of the defense of an uninhabitable house for me. And this, regardless of what fine, correct or sympathetic people these guys may be. It's a question of perspective. Once in response to Bordiga, Malatesta said, "But if, as these Marxists claim, the difference between us and them is not so substantial, instead of making us join their committees, why don't they come to ours?" Doing things among anarchists, then? Not at all. Acting on clear foundations, even in small groups, but addressing all the exploited, all those dissatisfied with this social prison. And including in what we do and say — whether it's a struggle against incinerators, against expulsions or for housing — the problem of prisons (and thus of our comrades inside). Not juxtaposing and pasting the "prison question" onto the rest, but rather exposing the real connections on the basis of common experience. Every autonomous struggle sooner or later comes up against repression (whether it faces it openly or retreats in order to avoid it). House occupations also pose the problem of the police, of the interests they defend, of ghettos and jails. Social self-organization is also always self-defense against repression.

Leaping to the Heart of the Opportunity

In certain respects, we have an opportunity: the opportunity to intervene in social conflicts — present and to come — without mediation. If the second-rate followers of authoritarian forces that have smothered so many subversive drives are down-at-the-heels in terms of numbers and projects, why should we help them out of their troubles? Why linger among the mummies when a strong wind blows? They make political calculations, we do not. In practical experience, it will be seen who is really for self-organization. We base ourselves on this.

With the general reformist retreat, the few realities about anticapitalist and anti-institutional positions are like a fire in the night — and so the temptation is strong to keep them tightly clasped on one side of certain barricades. But our strength is not there. Fourier said that a passion is revolutionary if it brings about an immediate increase in the enjoyment of life. This seems to me to be the most trustworthy standard. I know from experience that various young people have embraced some anarchic realities because they have discovered that in solidarity and with the courage of one's ideas, one lives better. Why? Because the weight of the commodity and of work is not so heavy if we face it together, because outlaw behavior is contagious for those who love freedom, because loving relationships without restraint can be more sincere and fulfilling, because in the union of thought and action, as Simone Weil said, the pact of the spirit with the universe is renewed. Here then is the enthusiasm that should inform our practice — the enthusiasm of thoughtful levity, not of demeaning frivolity. Because “bringing panic to the surface of

things” is thrilling; because there is no festival without a rupture with normality. Let’s leave certain words of sad militants to others and avoid the models that power knows and expects.

We will not manage to get across the river we find ourselves in now through any single endeavor no matter how good it is. We’d better say that it will take quite a bit of time. To find real affinity, to experiment with new articulate and imaginative forms of collective action, to mock police control, these are possibilities for us to reinvent amidst thousands of obstacles. One might respond, “Yes, but in the meantime there are comrades inside, in the meantime, repression is on our tail.” But isn’t the best thing that we could undertake for the imprisoned comrades perhaps to make those demands for life for which they have been locked up become socially dangerous? In this sense it is useless to look into political mirrors that tell us that we are not nude. Better a conscious nudity than any garment woven from illusions. Better to start again from scratch, far from the odor of corpses and the ideological rubbish incomprehensible to the undesirables of this world.

Thus, from so many sides, there is a need for a strong breach that brings unheard-of behavior into individual relationships as well as into the public squares. Not in the dramatic and self-promotional sense preferred by the sort with an artistic streak — notoriously corpse-like — , but rather in the sense of a new urgency for life that affirms itself without shame. There is a need for a class hatred that does not know what to make of the old complaints, and attacks the myriad nodes of daily exploitation. There is a need for an ethical tension that never confuses oppressors and oppressed, and

that doesn't waste its breath against the slaves of power — because it seeks to free itself from them, even with violence, but in order to go beyond. There is a need for a new generosity, armed and resolute, capable of overturning the shopkeepers' calculations of our contemporaries, capable of making contempt for money an individual and social behavior. In short, there is a need for us to find ways to express the unbearable reality of this world — of its jobs and its houses, of its consumption and of its morality — daily, constantly, insatiably. The social war plays out in our lives, because it is in daily life that capital weaves its web of alienation, of dependence, of great and small capitulations. Here is the alpha and omega of all social subversion.

Don't Say that We Are Few...

Say only that we are. This is how a famous anti-militarist sticker from many years ago began. It then went on to say that it was only some black cloud that darkened the sky. It wasn't just an artifice of optimism, but also a real experience.

For several years — at least fifteen — in the anarchist direct action movement (the one autonomous from the Federation and from syndicalism, to clarify), there has generally been little attention given to social conflicts and the more or less significant forms of the selforganization of the exploited. Aside from the historical reasons (the great pacification of the 1980's), this has been due to a problem of mental attitude. Many comrades who spoke of insurrection — an unquestionably social event — perceived society as a space inhabited almost entirely by the servile and the resigned. With such a vision they thus remained suspended between declarations

of principle and their effective experience: undecided with regard to an openly solitary revolt, slow to open the door to collective possibilities. (Who knows, maybe this is what gave birth to a certain rancor that spilled out in the disputes between comrades). Alongside this low sensitivity toward struggles that break through massification — but that nonetheless come out of massification — a certain capacity for autonomous intervention has developed, with a significant spread of practices of attack against the structures of domination (among them the nuclear industry, the military, banks, equipment of technological control and vivisection laboratories). Now something is changing, as if a confused individual need met with new social conditions — and from this come the comrades who speak unexpectedly of class struggle, perhaps even taking on loan interpretations and jargon from Marxism. It's just that often, aside from the rhetoric of flyers, their vision of society has remained the same: in short, that we are surrounded on all sides by accomplices of power. I believe that a lack of experience in directly lived and incited social struggles plays a major role in all this. Some local attempts have existed without yet reaching those instructive difficulties typical of expanded conflicts. Once again, we are at a crossing. Some practical reflection has been born on the basis of various blockades carried out by workers and others. Many of us have thrown ourselves into it, asking much more of these struggles than what they could express — safe then to turn around and complain of the servility of the exploited. Other occasions will not be lacking, nor perhaps will a greater attention on our part be missing. But that isn't enough.

I think that this is not at all the time for abandoning the taste for direct action, still in small groups. It's just that this should be better linked to social contexts, to perceivable dissatisfaction. How many opportunities have we lost (after Genoa, during the blockades of the death trains, after Nassiriya, during the tragedy of Cap Anamur, etc.)? Time is the element in which human beings live, and revolt is made of opportunities. We will have to study our possibilities better, instead of chasing our tails. Obviously, there have been a few noble exceptions (various actions after Genoa, others against biotechnology or the mechanisms of expulsions, some sabotage against the war, etc.), but they have been sporadic, surrounded by the clamor provoked by useless rhetoric, by proclamations thrown into the wind and by a practical (and ethical) distinction utterly lacking in clarity about who the enemies are. Precisely at a time when this clarity is necessary in the face of the indiscriminate violence that more and more often takes over in the moments of resistance and potential liberation of the damned of the earth. Those who continually repeat that the best theory is practice, but then leave much of what they do up to chance, particularly need this clarity. Maybe, blinded by the special effects of the spectacle, we either have too little trust in the consequences of our actions (allowing ourselves to get sloppy), or else we exaggerate their importance (allowing ourselves to be caught up in media illusions). There are effects that go on producing their causes.

The Great Game

It seems to me that the great game lies in the capacity for uniting a certain amount of daily daring (disrupting

social normality is possible everywhere, from public debates to fairs of consumption and cultural stupefaction, from work to the paranoia of control) with the readiness to act when moment is opportune. In order to be catalysts of the joy of living, and not Cassandras of the future capitalist collapse. Because anonymous and destructive action expresses the construction of a life that is not anonymous. Too vague? Of course, and it cannot be otherwise. Being the most serious of games, the match concerns everyone of us. Difficulties most certainly exist, considering the progressive loss of autonomous spaces, tragically eroded by the present social system and its many technological narcotics. And yet, the limits are often, above all, in our resoluteness and our imagination, weighed down as we are by the burden of habit in gestures, words and relationships. A wider encounter between various local realities will be come to be from respective autonomous pathways in thought and in struggle, not from an adding up of forces dictated by urgency. Then discussion will not be a motionless dance of set phrases, but rather the opportunity for learning from one another, for finally making the ways of living, i.e., the mutual worlds, communicate. Then, confidence and enthusiasm will be found again, and something resembling a common experience will be born.

Revolt is where levity and rigor meet.

A friend of Ludd,
September 2004.

MUTUAL UTILIZATION: RELATIONSHIP AND REVOLT IN MAX STIRNER

In the panorama of studies of Stirner there are many silences — silences that, as often happens, communicate more than words. One such silence surrounds Stirner's reflections on the theme of interpersonal relationships, reflections that form a genuine theory of life together. As is known, his considerations on relationships are contained in that section of *The Unique and Its Property* entitled "My Intercourse." Stirner attributed great importance to the description of the relations that the Unique maintains with others, as the vast amount of space he dedicates to the topic shows (it is in fact the largest section in the book). Nonetheless, "My Intercourse" has been and is perhaps the least explored part of Stirner's work. In any case, it is the least understood; a misunderstanding that Stirner himself already emphasized in the response to the critiques that Szeliga, Feuerbach and Hess had made of *The Unique and Its Property*.¹

In my opinion, a deep examination of the question of relationships in Stirner means not only studying what may be the most important part of his thought, but also confronting Stirner's most significant themes from an anarchist point of view (a point of view that obviously doesn't exhaust their complexity). "My Intercourse" contains his description of property (thus the critiques of the state, of Proudhon and of the communists), associative proposal of the union² of egoists (thus the judgment of the party, society and, more generally, hierarchical order), and the distinction between rebellion and revolution (thus the difference between demolition and the reformation of *what exists*).

For the same sort of reasons, it would be useful to spend some time on some of the more important and recurrent criticisms of Stirner's conception of relationships. In fact, though Stirner's thought is the object of such criticisms, much of their content could be referred more generally to any conception that radically affirms the centrality of the individual.

In Stirner, the awareness is clear that an extreme defense of individuality itself, before being a way of life, is way of understanding. When Stirner, drawing off Protagoras' motto, maintains that "the individual is the measure of all things," he means precisely that. One cannot understand his way of thinking about relationships between Uniques, if one doesn't first understand his way of conceiving the world of the Unique. In the same way, one cannot understand the coming together of individual owners — the union of egoists — if one doesn't first understand what Stirner means by individual owner. "Everyone is the center of his own world. World is only what he himself is not, but what belongs to him, is in a relationship with him, exists for him.

"Everything turns around you; you are the center of the outer world and of the thought world. Your world extends as far as your capacity, and what you grasp is your own simply because you grasp it. You, the Unique, are 'the Unique' *only together with 'your property.'*"³

In my opinion, this passage summarizes *The Unique and Its Property* as a whole. Stirner's way of understanding relationships between individuals, meaning mutual utilization, is only its logical and necessary consequence. Affirming that everyone is the center of his own world means denying any sort of authority and hierarchy, insofar as they claim to impose their

centrality, and imposing a perspective different and opposed to that of the individual, despoil him of his *property*.

Emphasizing the universality of uniqueness (in the sense that everyone is unique), Stirner does not set himself as *the* center, but as *a* center. Thus, uniqueness is closely connected to mutuality.

When Stirner speaks of a world, he means the collection of relationships that the Unique maintains with those other than himself, be they things or persons. The centrality with respect to the world is therefore centrality with respect to his relationships, and these latter being the “mutuality, action, *commercium* among individuals,”⁴ we see once again how centrality and mutuality presuppose each other.

If everyone is “unique” only together with his “property,” then everyone is “unique” only together with his relationships (with his world). The term uniqueness therefore excludes absoluteness, in that absolute — *ab-solutum* — means precisely the lack of relationships, of connections. Thus the critique made against Stirner that he transformed the I of Fichte into an equally absolute individual collapses. In fact, the Fichtean I, like Feuerbach’s human being, is an essence outside of the particular individual, not the flesh and blood individual, “transient and mortal.” It is a transcendent being that presupposes perfect community among human beings, whereas Stirner speaks of a Unique whose community with others is only thinkable, not real. In reality, we, as Uniques, are irreducibly different. We come to be equal only if we pose a “third,” external and transcendent — like Humanity, God or the State — that mediates relationships between us. And hierarchy consists precisely

of this “third”; I no longer value the other for what my relationship with him is, meaning what he is for me, but rather in relation to an entity that contains us and links us together.⁵

If everyone, as unique, is exclusive and exclusivist, his existence cannot incline toward community, but rather toward *one-sidedness*. No longer having anything that unites us, we no longer have anything that separates us or makes us enemies. In fact, “the opposition disappears in complete — separateness or uniqueness.”⁶ It is precisely the awareness of our one-sidedness (of having our own perspective) that allows us to rise up against hierarchy, against the order of dependence on which every state is based, and to lay the foundations for a new associative form — the union — based on radically different presuppositions. “Let’s not seek the most comprehensive community, ‘human society,’ but let’s seek in others only means and organs that we use as our property!”⁷

In the “reduction” of the other to means, some have wanted to see a defense of exploitation⁸, the negation of every form of non-conflictual relationship, the legitimization of a war that opens the way to “collective suicide.”⁹ If one instead inserts it into Stirner’s conception of the world, one realizes that it is the only form of relationship that doesn’t deny the centrality of the individual and that is based on real mutuality.

The typical form of religious alienation consists in attributing value to a person or a thing in the absolute sense, meaning independently of our relationship to it. The belief in a being that has value in itself and for itself, thus, worthy of our “enthusiasm,” absolutely interesting (i.e., an interesting object without and

interested subject), presupposes the ideological “fixed idea” of a hierarchical order. In fact, I can consider a person absolutely deserving of love, respect, etc., only if I don’t consider her for herself, but place her in relation (and thus subordinate her) to a higher being — let’s say God, the state, or society — and consider as “part” of it. Thence, it is not the particular individual in its unrepeatable uniqueness with whom I enter into relationship, but rather the christian, the citizen, the *member* of society.

Contrarily, seeking the value of every thing and every person within and not outside myself, I affirm my centrality in relation to the world, to my world. In this way, “If I cherish and care for you, because I love you, because my heart finds nourishment in you and my desire finds satisfaction in you, this is not for the sake of some higher being,... but out of egoistic pleasure: you yourself with *your own* being have value to me, because your essence is not a higher being, is not higher or more general than you, is unique as you yourself, because you are it.”¹⁰

The awareness of one’s egoism, thus of one’s use of the other, comes to be the only way of recognizing and appreciating his value, those properties of his that, even though they don’t exhaust his uniqueness, communicate something — however non-essential — about him to me. And being, as I said, mutual use, each individual, each Unique, is the beginning and end of his relational activity.

Precisely because, even from a biological point of view, I cannot take as a reference anything different from myself; what is other than me, I can only think of (and for Stirner, thought in its universality cannot

grasp the peculiarity of the bodily and momentary I) as subject, but in the very moment that it crosses my path, it exists for me, and all that I seem to owe to it, I owe only to myself. Saying therefore that "For me you are nothing but my food, even as I too am fed upon and consumed by you,"¹¹ is not the expression of a paranoiac desire to crush (a relationship between "ruminants" as Kuno Fischer described it), but rather a calm affirmation of our centrality and our one-sidedness.

It is important to note how Stirner, when he states that "we have have a single relationship with one another, that of *usability*, utility, use," he emphasizes again and again the mutuality inherent in such relationships (as opposed to the hierarchical relationship that, posing absolute values, negates it).

If I consider the other as "an *object* for which I may feel something or also nothing, a usable or non-usable subject," with which to get on and reach an agreement "so as to increase *my power* through this alliance and be able to succeed, by uniting our forces, where one alone would fail," I realize that it is not only a matter of a mutual utilization, but also of a utilizable mutuality¹²

The deliberate stress that Stirner places on the usability of the relationships that the Unique maintains with the other only aims to emphasize how in the relationship between individual owners there is a mutual interest in the person and not, as morality and religion claim, a mutual renunciation. Real love, as opposed to idealized love, is a self-interested emotion and not an act of self-denial. In fact, "we want to love because we feel love, because love is pleasant to our heart and our senses, and in love for the other person we feel a higher enjoyment of ourselves."¹³ It is the same love for the other

that leads me to “joyfully sacrifice for him innumerable pleasures of mine,” to “give up innumerable things to see his smile blossom again,” and to “put at risk for him the thing that, if he were not there, would be the dearest thing in the world to me: my life or my well-being or my freedom. Or rather my pleasure and my happiness consist precisely in the enjoyment of his happiness and pleasure.” “But,” Stirner emphasizes, “there is something that I don’t sacrifice to him: *myself*; I remain an egoist and enjoy him.”¹⁴

The charge Stirner makes against all those improvers of humanity — like Baron von Stein¹⁵ — who preach the principle of love is significant: “You love human beings, so you torment the individual human being, the egoist: your love of humanity is cruelty to human beings.”¹⁶

If “every religion is a cult of society, this principle, by which the social (civilized) human being is dominated,”¹⁷ the awareness of egoism and the refusal of self-renunciation can only lead Stirner to elucidate a new form of associative relation, the union of egoists.

Once the state and society are negated as historical forms of mediated life together that transcend the individual and are therefore alienated, associative relationships have to have completely different characteristics.

The main element is that the individual associates for her own individual interests and not for a hierarchical and extortionist “common good.” For Stirner, society is only an additional product of individuals whose interests are unique. Thinking of society — as Proudhon himself does — as a collective subject, as an “ethical person,” means condemning the particular individual, in the name of a religious general interest, to one of the worst forms of despotism.¹⁸ The Unique doesn’t want to

be made the object of collective ends, becoming a tool of society, but rather considers society as one of his means. As B. R. Tucker rightly maintained: "Society is not a person nor a thing, but a relation; and a relation can have no rights,"¹⁹ nor — I would add — can it impose duties. But since, for Stirner, established society cannot block the individual from making value of herself, nor can the future societies promised by socialists and communists expropriate him of his property, the separation from the social order must be so complete and decisive as to "bring about the end of separation itself" and be overturned in federation,²⁰ in union. In fact, "as the Unique, you can assert yourself only in the union, because the union doesn't possess you, but rather you possess it or make use of it." Property only gets recognized in it, because I no longer hold what is my own as a fief from any being,²¹ but I myself am to be its source and its self-guarantee. Private "property," on the other hand, is only a state concession, a fief that transforms the individual "owner" into a vassal; it is the political form of pauperism and vassalage. Only once the "war of all against all" — which isn't a form of expanded domination, but the calm acceptance of the conflict of interests — is declared, the union will be able to be born as the "multiplier" of individual powers, as a tool, as a "sword" for increasing one's capacities and thus, since everyone is unique only together with his property, and thus reinforce the feeling of uniqueness.

The choice of association must be voluntary, just as the breaking of the associative agreement must be free and voluntary. By associating, the particular individual doesn't renounce his own individuality, as occurs in society, but on the contrary, affirms it in all its fullness.

When an individual needs to unite with others to achieve a specific objective (a need that is not at all contradictory, or better, paradoxical with regards to one's being unique), what may appear to be a sacrifice — as a limitation of his freedom would appear — is only a deployment of his powers. In fact, not being able to meet all of her needs by herself, by associating he only sacrifices what he does not possess, i.e., she “doesn’t sacrifice a goddamn thing.” To put it another way: not having the freedom “to do it by himself,” it’s not possible to maintain that he sacrifices it by uniting (and obviously coming to an agreement) with others. In each instance, if one wants to speak of limitations as such, what is reduced in the union is freedom (but it’s a case of mutual restrictions not determined by authority and the *sacred* as happens in the state and the church), not one’s individuality. For Stirner, “the ideal of ‘absolute freedom’ expresses the absurdity of every absolute.” Only one who thinks — religiously — of freedom as an absolute could fail to perceive the differences between a form of relationship that guarantees to everyone the expression of their exclusivity (and doesn’t limit their freedom except with those rules that are inherent to the relationship itself)²² and a communitarian order which — as something sacred — is based on subjection and the lack of individual self-valorization.

Since the union, unlike society, the state or the church has no existence autonomous from the particular individuals who compose it, its duration is determined by the interests of the “participants.” It is therefore a “unceasing coming-back-together” as opposed to the “already-being-together” typical of (and foundational to) every hierarchical relationship. A “*taking-part*” in

a game to which one contributes to establishing the *rules*, as opposed to a “*being-part*” of a social order that presents itself as authority and imposes its *laws*.

The union is not only an alternative to society, but also a tool for rising up, for rebelling against hierarchy, authority, the state (a word which Stirner often uses to indicate the *entire existing order*). Considered both as a relational form and as a counter-association, the union is closely connected to rebellion.

If “my egoism has an interest in liberating the world so that it becomes — my property,”²³ the demolition of what exists, the overturning of given conditions, while being inevitable consequences of rebellion, don’t exhaust my incentive for insurrection, which is the only way to affirm my centrality in the world, and thus in my relations. Without insurrection I cannot create relations that are not mediated, by God or by the state, “mutual relationships such that everyone..., in these relationships, can be truly what he is.”²⁴ Equally, without my egoistic will to rise up, the union against authority and hierarchy ceases to be my tool and ends up becoming — “just as from a thought a fixed idea arises” — a higher being, a party. Only a form of relationship that affirms the uniqueness of the particular individual is able to avoid reproducing the order of dependence within itself. The Unique cannot oppose hierarchy through a means — the party — that is only “a state within the state,” “a ready-made society” for which he is supposed to renounce his own individuality.

This battle can also take place with “millions of people together”²⁵; what matters is that the multitude is not transformed into the subject, into that “all” which preserves the traits of transcendence and, thus, of

mediation. What opposes mutuality — the *Mann gegen Mann*²⁶ relationship that, alone, can confirm uniqueness — to hierarchy is not the number, either positively or negatively. In fact, and I think this is very important, a “collective” dimension (in the sense of I+I+I...) with an individualistic character can be created, just like an individual dimension with a collectivist and alienating character can be created. What distinguishes the defense of individual autonomy from the formation of domination is the associative *method*. But Stirner, when he speaks of the relationship, of the union of Uniques, refers only to the “form” of such relations: a form that is able to guarantee the centrality of each one. “For Stirner, going beyond the ‘formal’ moment means going back to creating spooks, legitimizing domination, making space for the magic circle,”²⁷ meaning that moment of alienation that gets created in the dichotomy between being and having-to-be, between existence and essence. Precisely by not creating a new *heaven*, a new mission, Stirner holds that the contents of the union, the rules of play, will be the exclusive property of the Uniques. If Stirner’s “political” dimension can seem like a utopia, it remains, as the relational world of the Unique, thence of a “who” that cannot be described, an “empty” utopia.

The one-sidedness, the separateness of each Unique still remains (or rather, only becomes complete) in the union. Thus, one cannot make uniqueness correspond with isolation. The individual who associates is no less an egoist than the one who prefers to “stand alone”; what changes is the object of her egoism.²⁸ If one unites with others, it is because he finds in their company a reason for interest, for enjoyment. If one prefers to isolate himself, it means that human beings

no longer have anything to offer her. "Remaining is no less egoistic than isolating oneself."²⁹ The distinction is therefore not between egoism and non-egoism, but, if you will, between a "poor" egoism and a "rich" egoism. "One who loves a human being," Stirner says, "through this same love is richer than another who doesn't love anyone," since she has one more "property." Stirner's egoism is thus full participation in life, in relationships with others.

Alongside the charge that he wanted to "atomize" individuals, the charge that Stirner, with his union of egoists, limits himself to proposing only a variant in terminology of capitalist society, a mirror image, however extreme, of the bourgeois order,³⁰ also shows all its inconsistencies. Stirner, after showing the ideological "glue" of capitalist society is humanistic morality (an internal "sanctimonious priest" who preaches sacrifice), maintains that if one had a more aware egoism, one would take into account that "cooperation is *more useful* than isolation" and that the abandonment of "competition" — that hidden conflict, as mediated by the state — is nothing but a response to a higher feeling of our uniqueness.

In the union of egoists, exploitation ("assertion at the expense of others") is eliminated as soon as the co-associates, equally aware egoists, "no longer want to be such fools as to let anyone live at their expense."³¹

In a careful reading of Stirner's thought, it also seems obvious that one cannot associate the interests of the Unique with liberal utilitarianism.³² Bentham's arithmetic of pleasures still consists of a belief in a thing that is interesting in the absolute sense, meaning a belief in a "sacred" thing. And we know how for Stirner, any

behavior toward something as interesting in itself and for itself is always religious behavior.³³ For Stirner, self-interest is not a principle, it is “a mere name, a concept empty of content, utterly lacking any conceptual development.”³⁴ In the eyes of our philosopher, “the moral system of self-interest condemns the real self-interest of particular individuals, in much the same way as the supposed universality of reason forces ‘private reason’ to submit.”³⁵

From this obviously incomplete picture I’ve drawn of relationship and association as found in Stirner one can, I think, understand how it isn’t possible to transform the union of egoists into a *bellum omnium contra omnes* that does nothing but again propose the domination of human being over human being as the sole form of life together.

The Unique of whom Stirner speaks is not moved in her relations with others by the “pleasure of being rude” that characterizes Dostoevsky’s character from the underground. What drives her is not at all the need for the impossible of that inexorable *appétit d’être* that leads Camus’ Caligula to state that “One is always free at someone else’s expense.” Also foreign to Stirner is that fear of death which, in Canetti’s account, the sultan of Delhi is striving to defeat when he decides to raze the city to the ground in order to enjoy an instant of that “solitary *uniqueness*” that comes from the “feeling of having survived all men.”³⁶

Stirner “doesn’t defend the power of the individual to dominate others.”³⁷ since he shows in an extremely significant way that the exercise of domination is a strongly de-individualizing practice. And since “whoever has to count on the lack of will in others in

order to exist, is a shoddy product of these others, as the master is a shoddy product of the slave,”³⁸ domination comes to be a form of individual disempowerment. And this disempowerment is also accompanied by a process of alienation in that the force of the individual gets subordinated to the proof of the inferiority of others. The desire to dominate³⁹ consists of the pleasure of prevailing over others, i.e., the effort of escaping a condition that one perceives as *equality*. If, instead, one is aware of one’s own exclusivity, of one’s being irreducibly different from every one else, one can only reject the craving for “superiority” as a homogenizing principle. The power of which Stirner speaks is the capacity to place oneself before others as an individual, without having recourse to the “convenient bulwark of authority.” In fact, one is quite weak (and incomplete) if one must summon (or needs to be) an authority.⁴⁰ Only in the negation of authority can the individual reject the alienated life of the docile, usable citizen, the ruler’s subject who leads an existence that moves to the rhythms of *service*.

There’s no need to emphasize how many similarities there are between Stirner’s union and anti-authoritarian associational conceptions. It’s no accident that the anarchist thinkers⁴¹ who have most consistently harked back to Stirner are the ones who have perhaps contributed the most to the description of acratia and contractarianism. The notion — for example — of “the method of equal liberty” recalls much that is close to Stirner’s thesis of the equal inequality in the relations between Uniques.

Drawing on a theme already developed by E. de La Boetie, that of voluntary servitude, Stirner affirms that “When subservience ceases to be, it will be all over

rulership as well!" and after proposing insurrection as the sole solution to the "social question," he adds in reproach: "If the rich exist, it is the fault of the poor." A few years later, the anarchist Bellagarigue wrote: "Have you believed that up to today there have been tyrants? Well, you are still wrong, because there are only slaves: where no one obeys, no one commands."⁴²

Stirner notes how domination and hierarchy, along with (or perhaps before) being a structuring of inter-individual power, are forms of intra-individual alienation, the process of internalizing the "sacred." It is in social customs, seen as forms of the "compulsion to repeat," that he identifies the continuous reproduction of alienation.

Thus, between individual owners who refuse subordination before any social order — with its customs, its models of behavior — the only possible relationships are those based on the — contrived, precarious, and always changeable — balance between the egoisms of individuals. Associative relations cannot be based on the imposition of a fictitious equality, nor can a higher synthesis be created between the individual powers. Stirner radically negates any theory of the identification of the individual with the collectivity, of the supersession of the individual in the social. Every individual conscious of his uniqueness will always be ready to rise up against any attempt to *settle*, through whatever form of authoritarian "*fixed idea*," the antagonism between individuals.⁴³ Rebellion, then, is not just a transitional phase from society to the union, but rather an attitude of constant insurrection against every power, against every *heaven*, that debases one's inalienable exclusivity. Without a continuous, extremist of one's autonomy,

there could certainly be a *revolution*, but it would still just be a *reform* of the existent.

At the basis of Stirner's ideas on relationships, there is the clear awareness of the irreconcilability between the conception of those who hold that only the establishment of order can guarantee liberty and those who instead affirm that from liberty alone can order be born.

It is a matter, if you will, of the eternal conflict between synthesis and balance, between authority and liberty. And there should be no more doubt about where to place Stirner in this conflict.

NOTES

[1] Max Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*

[2] It's important to not that both the Italian word "unione," which Passamani uses, and the German word "Verein," which Stirner uses have no connection whatsoever to labor unions. — *Translator's note.*

[3] Stirner, *op.cit.*

[4] Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, in "My Intercourse."

[5] It's no accident that Stirner emphasized the mediating nature of the state seen as one of the greatest expressions of hierarchy.

[6] Ibid., in "My Power."

[7] Ibid., in "My Intercourse."

[8] M. Hess, *The Last Philosophers.*

[9] Albert Camus, *The Rebel.*

[10] Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, in "The Possessed."

[11] Ibid., in "My Intercourse."

[12] The preceding passages are all to be found in "My Intercourse" in Stirner's book.

[13] Stirner, *The Philosophical Reactionaries*

[14] *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Intercourse.”

[15] The liberal at who Stirner takes aim in his essay “Some Preliminary Notes on the Love-State.”

[16] *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Intercourse.”

[17] Ibid., in “My Intercourse.”

[18] Before Stirner, the American anarchist, Josiah Warren, summarized his thought using the formula of “individual sovereignty” as opposed to the liberal formula of “popular sovereignty,” the foundation of the 1776 declaration of independence. Not randomly. The ideological appearance of domination always revolves around an abstract collective being; thus, the only way to eliminate archism in all its forms is to bring the notions of liberty, autonomy, independence back to the particular individual. The basis of all modern dictatorship is represented by Rousseau’s “general will.” It could only be something concrete if it was the product of all the individual wills. But for Rousseau, the general will is not the will of everyone, but rather something transcendent, right and infallible, independent of individual wills. Appropriately, Rocker described it as a form of political Providence. The Jacobin, marxist and Nazi dictatorships are merely different methods for using the same instrument of power: the cult of the general good. The usefulness of Stirner’s thought for demystifying the hierarchical blackmail of the democratic system seems obvious.

[19] Benjamin Tucker, *Individual Liberty*.

[20] Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*. In the same way, Warren maintained that the sole terrain on which acratie relations can be established is that of “disassociation, disunion, individualization.”

[21] See *ibid.*, in “My Intercourse.”

[22] The limits consist in relational, not moral, obligations, methodological obligations, not duties.

[23] *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Intercourse.”

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] So much so that there have been those who, by jerking his thought around quite a bit, have made of Stirner a precursor of revolutionary syndicalism.

[26] In German in the original. Literally “man against man.” — *Translator’s note*.

[27] So writes R. Escobar in *Il cerchio magico. Max Stirner: la politica dalla gerarchia alla reciprocità* (The Magic Circle, Max Stirner: Politics from Hierarchy to Mutuality), ed. Franco Angeli, Milano, Italy, 1986, page 15. My considerations in this writing are freely inspired by Escobar’s study.

[28] Isolating oneself and associating are only different forms of relationships. Even solitude — Ortega y Gasset maintained — is a relationship, in which one participates in the form of absence.

[29] Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*

[30] This is Moses Hess' thesis, taken back up by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, and later repeated by (almost) all marxist scholars who are interested in Stirner.

[31] Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*

[32] Marx and Engels portrayed Stirner's thought as the final, degenerated landing-place of liberal utilitarianism. See *The German Ideology*.

[33] Stirner, *Stirner's Critics*.

[34] Ibid.

[35] F. Andolfi, "Egoismo e solidarietà sociale: riflessioni su Stirner" ("Egoism and Social Solidarity: Reflections on Stirner"), in *Nietzsche-Stirner*, pg. 163.

[36] See Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*; Camus, *Caligula*; Canetti, *Power and Survival*. Stirner's influence on Dostoevsky's characters, as well as on Camus' *The Rebel* and *Caligula*, have been pointed out by other authors. For the Dostoevsky-Stirner connection, see R. Calasso, "The Artificial Barbarian" in *The Ruin of Kasch*; J. Carroll *Breakout from the Crystal Palace: The Anarcho-psychological Critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky*; F. Andolfi, *op.cit.* For the Camus-Stirner connection, see F. Andolfi; G. Penzo, *Max Stirner: la rivolta esistenziale* (Max Stirner: The Existentialist Revolt); R. Escobar, *op.cit.* But it seems to me that no one has pointed out Canetti's references to Stirner. And yet in his way of presenting the figure

of the sultan, it seems to me that there is a clear reference to Stirner.

[37] J. Carroll, *op.cit.*

[38] Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, in “My Power.”



[39] According to Camus, a “*désir de domination*” is what drives Stirner (see *The Rebel*)

[40] Stirner’s refusal of the principle of authority is contained in the essay *The False Principle of Our Education or Humanism or Realism*.

[41] I am referring specifically to Benjamin Tucker, Stephen Byington and Emile Armand.

[42] Anselme Bellegarrigue, (*The World’s First*) *Anarchist Manifesto*.

[43] It seems to me that the distinction between the balance of antagonisms and order based on imposition recalls, if I am allowed to hazard a comparison, the difference between the harmony of opposing tensions of Heraclitus and Empedocles’ harmony, a unity based on the cyclic predominance of one element over the other, of *philia* (love) over *neikos* (strife) and vice versa.



If we were to
wait for the
delegitimation
of power
before attacking
it, we'd be in
trouble. But
fortunately,
waiting is not
among the
risks of the
insatiable. The
only thing we
have to lose is
our patience.

